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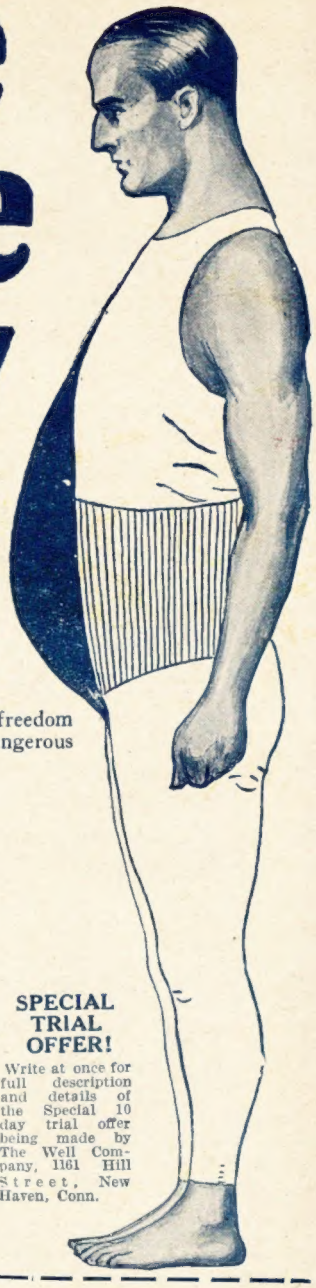

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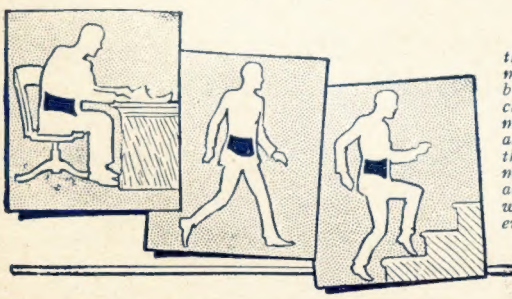

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ROBERT SIMPSON, EDITOR

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Around the Corner

HE straight road, however emblematic it may be of the virtuous life, has a tendency to become monotonous, and everyone knows it is the prospect of turning corners that makes life really interesting.

In the life of a magazine every issue is another corner, and the next issue of MYSTERY MAGAZINE, out March 1, is well worthy of a preliminary peek.

A. L. Erlanger, the Napoleon of producers, tells of "The Most Mysterious Happening in My Life" through the medium of Bide Dudley.

Richard Howell Watkins, who knows aeroplanes, yet never flies so high as to forget to laugh, furnishes a complete novelette called "Wings to Wisdom."

Dale Collins, in the second *Peter Lamb* story, demonstrates the sweetness of the "Fruits of Innocence."

Tod Robbins, known far and wide as the author of "The Unholy Three," tells a wild, weird tale of "Cock Crow Inn."

Agatha Christie, who has an enviable reputation as a writer of mystery stories, enhances this reputation considerably with "Wireless."

And Thomas Topham solves an utterly impossible problem by showing quite conclusively how "Blackie Wins 289 Years."

On a vaudeville program, each and every one of these performances would be designated by a star. They are indicative of what may be expected in every issue of MYSTERY MAGAZINE.

Sight and Sound

By VICTOR LAURISTON

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

CHAPTER I

THE FATAL WAGER

WITH hilarious shouts and merry laughter the crowd of week-end guests trooped out upon the sunlit lawn of Graystones. All voted Wandell Clegg a wonderful host, uncannily prescient in his selection of a bootlegger.

All, that is, except one—a tall young man who stalked grimly in advance of the crowd. He had no share in the hilarity. His dark, rather good-looking face was set like granite.

Clive Potts, a bald-headed old beau, nudged young Henry Dickon III.

"Henry," he gurgled, "you better leave pretty May Lavigne alone. That young man of hers looks deadly."

Dickon hiccoughed:

"I'm not afraid of any damned Frenchman that ever — hic — ever walked. If May Lavigne—hic—likes me better 'n she—hic—likes him——"

"He's a dead shot," warned Clive Potts. "So if you're not careful you'll be shot dead."

"'Nstead of half shot—an'—hic—dead to the world——"

Dickon grinned.

Harry Fairgreve, halting, clapped his hands, to draw the attention of the gay party.

"Friends, commuters, millionaires, Ford owners and bum companions," he orated, "we come to bury a feud, and not to make one. Lend me your ears and your loose change. Say, can anyone tell me where's Tuff Tufford?"

"Tuff Tufford's sore," interjected Henry Dickon III. "Eh, Wendell?"

Wendell Clegg, a rather handsome man of middle-age, smiled at the questioner.

"Aw, never mind Tuff, friends. That little run-in we had didn't amount to anything. Tuff and I are good friends." Clegg's tone was tipsy.

"Tuff Tufford," opined Potts, punful as ever, "is shamming drunk in there, so he can see if the sham champagne is really a sham."

"Let him be," urged Wendell Clegg. "Go on, Harry."

"Right-o!" orated Fairgreve. He was a tall, handsome man of thirty-five, Clegg's lawyer and business agent. "Lest any nice boy or innocent girl here was too far gone to understand, let me recapitulate the terms of the wager. Our good friend, Mr. Frank Lavigne, has a pretty wife. Our good host, Wendell Clegg, wants to run around with her. Frank, for some mysterious reason, objects. He says . . . well, we'll forget what he says. Clegg says, 'Why kill me? Why not kill a bottle with me, and let me have merry, merry May?"

"Merry, merry May is good," opined Potts, *sotto voce*, with a leer at May Lavigne. She was a pretty, light-headed matron with fair bobbed hair and heedlessly coquettish aspect. She regarded the wager with mild amusement; her friendly smile at big, handsome Wendell Clegg indicated that she viewed his attentions with no great disfavor.

"Now," pursued Fairgreve, "to arrange the target."

He studied the stone wall that enclosed the terrace. Near the lower corner a series of stone steps had been built against the wall; the topmost step afforded an outlook upon the valley with its wilderness of green and its distant lake.

To an accompaniment of careless raillery, Fairgreve arranged a half-dozen bottles on the second step from the top. The stonework behind would halt any bullet.

"Now," he went on, "here's the wager. If our good friend Frank Lavigne can break the necks of six bottles in six shots at seventy-five feet distance, Wen Clegg ceases——"

"Ceases," chirruped irrepressible Clive Potts, "to be a wen on the neck of Frank's life——"

"Undertakes," gaily translated Fairgreve, "to drop out of merry, merry May's life. Then, Pottsy, you can go in and win."

Clive Potts fatuously ogled pretty May Lavigne. The crowd laughed. For May Lavigne, even if she had smiled on Wendell Clegg who was considerable of a man, would never bestow a second glance on this bald-headed, woman-hunting old punster.

"If, on the contrary," pursued Fairgreve, "Frank Lavigne misses even one of the six bottle necks, he undertakes to put up his gun and—may the best man win the prize."

Fairgreve bowed to Mrs. Lavigne. Frank Lavigne glowered.

"A moment," he interpolated.

He crossed to his fair young wife and spoke to her earnestly:

"May, why not end this ridiculous wager? You can do it with a word. I ask you again, will you go away with me? Put this sort of life behind you? Forever?"

Pretty May Lavigne laughed.

"Aw, Frank," she drawled, "be a sport, can't you?"

Her careless tone made the man wince. He spoke in a hoarse undertone:

"Remember, I won't miss. Since you insist on a wager, I'm going to win." He handled the rifle confidently, yet his eyes lingered in his wife's face with a mute appeal that would have reached anyone less frivolous.

She merely laughed.

"Run along, Frankie, and play the game. Don't pout. I hate you when you pout, but"—with sudden, ghastly coquetry—"I almost love you when you play the game—*and win.*"

Without another word young Lavigne recrossed the lawn to Fairgreve's side. The tall lawyer indicated where he was to stand.

"Any last words," interpolated the thick voice of Henry Dickon III, "before sentence is pronounced?"

Lavigne spoke:

"Just this. I despise you all for making a wager of things that would be sacred to decent people." His fierce look seared them. "I despise myself still more for letting you crowd me into this. But I'm going to win and"—his grim gaze rested on Wendell Clegg—"you're going to live up to your undertaking. For if you don't I—I'll kill you." His voice grew gusty with passion. "That," he snapped, in sharp conclusion, "goes for this whole damned crowd."

He took time to aim with exceeding care. Henry Dickon III put in a drunken suggestion:

"Let's make this more than—hic—a one-round bout. We're payin' enough for the show—Tuff Tufford's drinkin' all the — hic — champagne while we're out here. You count, Harry—shots five minutes apart. If he shoots before you—hic—count—call it a miss. Eh?

"Dickon," retorted Harry Fairgreve, "you're just drunk enough to talk sense."

"I say, get the mockery over with," fiercely protested Lavigne.

"No, no," chorused the others. Their antagonism to this young man who was one of them only by reason of his wife's popularity was evident.

Lavigne pondered. His anger had hardened in these last few moments.

"I agree," he said.

Manifestly, he calculated that with the five-minute interval to steady him the infinitesimal risk of missing would become still less.

Clegg, with rather unsteady steps, went down to the stone steps and proceeded to rearrange the bottles.

"Get over to one side, Wen," shouted Fairgreve. "Frank might miss. And you, folks," he waved his hand to the others, "you get back toward the house." He set the example of safety first by stepping back ten paces or more, past a clump of shrubbery.

"When I count one—two—three—"

"I understand," interrupted impatient Lavigne.

"All ready. Clegg, for God's sake, get out of range."

"You wen, you excrescence," shrieked hilarious Clive Potts, "get over it if you don't want to be bowled over."

But Wendell Clegg, though tipsy, took no chances. Having deliberately rearranged the bottles, he withdrew thirty feet to the right of the target.

"All ready, ladies and gentlemen," cried Fairgreve. "Fix your eyes on the target. If Frank scores a hit, yell. If it's a miss——"

"Hiss," suggested Potts.

There was a moment's tense silence. Even that heedless, frivolous, semi-intoxicated crowd on the terrace of Graystones felt some thrill of suspense.

Fairgreve's strong voice rang out:

"One—two—three——

"Fire!"

Simultaneously came the crack of the rifle. A hiss went up, followed by a roar of laughter, which shrank into affrighted silence when Wendell Clegg with a sharp cry crumpled into a heap.

CHAPTER II

THE TACITURN MR. OAKES

THE report that came over the the telephone to Coroner Ross at Milford was decidedly excited and incoherent.

"I'd better take Monck with me," determined the coroner.

So, on his way through Milford, he called for the county officer who had jurisdiction over that stretch of farm, forest and country homes that included the Graystones estate of Wendell Clegg.

Monck, an alert officer of middle age, had a visitor when Doctor Ross bustled in. This visitor was an oldish man, dressed with the grave professional decorum of the old-time country lawyer, very neat, very white hair, but with a curiously young and rosy face. Monck interrupted the coroner's story:

"By the way, doctor, will you meet Mr. Granville Oakes?" Then, in a whisper, "He's a lawyer from Pemabec, Maine."

Doctor Ross greeted Mr. Oakes perfunctorily, then went on with his story. Monck listened attentively.

Mr. Granville Oakes of Pemabec, Maine, also listened attentively.

"Accident, you say?" commented Monck.

"*They* say," emphasized the coroner. "From the rather confused statement the man gave me—Fairgreve, it was—this young fellow, Lavigne——"

The white-haired Mr. Oakes betrayed sudden interest.

"Not Francis Lavigne?"

"Do you know him?" challenged Ross.

"Knew him in Pemabec. French stock — serious, dependable, honest and—the surest shot I ever knew.

His two companions exchanged odd glances.

"So?" commented the coroner.

"If it's the same Lavigne, I'd like to go with you," volunteered Oakes.

But, having betrayed this much loquacity, he went through the long drive in almost perfect silence. The coroner and the officer, in the front seat of the little car, talked in undertones.

"From what I could make out," explained Doctor Ross to Monck, "it was one of these week-end booze parties Wendell Clegg was so fond of. The row between Clegg and Lavigne started over Lavigne's wife. Fairgreve tried to turn it into a joke. Nice chap, that Fairgreve; to my way of thinking, too good a fellow to run with a bunch like that . . . Well, Lavigne being a bit tipsy, the joke became a tragedy."

Oakes interrupted:

"You'll find Frank Lavigne wasn't tipsy."

"Eh? Oh, no." Coroner Ross lowered his voice. "Who's your odd friend, Monck?"

"He's not my friend," confided Monck in the same undertone. "He just blew in this afternoon—from Pemabec, Maine, where total abstainers grow on the bushes and the strongest liquor at a week-end party is malted milk. Funny, he came to me for help in finding Lavigne. Had traced him to New York, then to Milford, and wanted to get to Graystones." He raised his voice: "Anyway, it's more than even betting most of that crowd were drunk—not that their wits are any great use to them when they're sober."

Doctor Ross spoke bitingly:

"I'll admit Wendell Clegg was a successful business man. But the way he squandered his money, he might better have never earned it. A man whose idea of a good time is a speed car, a plentiful supply of booze and the pursuit of some other man's wife, is unfit to live. Some of us in Milford imagined it was a great thing for the country when a big man like Wendell Clegg decided to make his summer home there. Graystones has turned out a plague spot."

"H'm," muttered Monck. "From what I've heard, I've been looking for something to break. My only surprise is that the shooting was accidental."

"Well, here we are." Coroner Ross turned the car into the drive. "And there's Harry Fairgreve."

Clegg's lawyer was introduced to the taciturn Mr. Oakes and shook hands all round. Coroner Ross, who rather liked Fairgreve, observed with distinct approval that the young lawyer's manner was serious and restrained.

"It's a bad affair, doctor," said Fairgreve. "Accident, of course, but—well, it just knocked me all in a heap, to think of old Wen Clegg going out that way. Of course he had his faults."

"I'll say he had his faults." The coroner's tone was biting. "Where is he now?"

"Still lying there. I ran to him when he fell, but he was stone dead. So I thought it best to leave the body."

"Right," approved the coroner.

"I herded everybody else into the house and gave orders for no one to leave until you got here."

Ross approved this also. Fairgreve, he commented to Monck, had shown commendable common sense.

Fairgreve now led the way toward the stone-walled enclosure where the shooting had occurred. Coroner Ross glanced oddly at the six bottles, still standing on the stone step.

"I may as well admit," said Fairgreve in a hard tone, "that we'd all

been drinking. Some of us perhaps too much."

Mr. Granville Oakes of Pemabec, Maine, had followed the others with slow, lumbering steps. So slow, so heavy, he made one think of the traditional tortoise.

"All?" he commented. "Lavigne, too?"

Fairgreve for the first time observed the man closely. Here, he mused, was an old customer.

"Lavigne," he returned shortly, "didn't drink at all. You're right there, Mr. Oakes."

"Oh!" With which non-committal monosyllable Mr. Oakes once more dropped out of the conversation.

Ross bent over the body.

"Shot through the head," he commented. "Must have died instantly."

To Officer Monck and the coroner Harry Fairgreve told the entire story in detail.

"So there *was* ill-feeling between the men?" sharply commented Monck.

Fairgreve nodded reluctant assent.

"You know how Wen Clegg was with women? Rather——"

"Rather a beast," Ross was mercilessly blunt. "Don't try to excuse him to me, Mr. Fairgreve. Milford's decent community, and I look at these things with Milford's eyes, partly because it pays me to agree with my patients and partly because Milford happens to be absolutely right."

"Graystones is in a class with Sodom and Gomorrah, eh?" Fairgreve ventured a hard smile. "Well, just after luncheon Lavigne found Clegg flirting with merry May. May Lavigne took it all in, as women will, smiling at Wen. Lavigne threatened Clegg. The noise they made drew the crowd. Then I butted in and tried to turn the thing into a joke. I'd had a few glasses myself," Fairgreve smiled ruefully, "and my wits weren't hitting on all four. But I fancied if I could make a joke of it and get 'em apart till Lavigne got his wife away from Graystones, there'd be no trouble."

"And the joke?"

Fairgreve explained.

"Well, it was a fool idea," commented Ross, "to make a woman the stake in a shooting-match. Still, I couldn't expect much better from this crowd you choose to run with. I suppose your intentions were good."

Fairgreve bit his lip.

"I knew Lavigne was a dead shot. At that distance he couldn't miss. I calculated May would be game enough sport to abide by the decision."

"She wasn't," commented Ross, in that same biting tone, "game enough sport to stick by the husband she'd chosen. Eh?"

Fairgreve flushed. The coroner, with this opportunity to unleash his long pent-up feelings regarding the crowd at Graystones, was perhaps unfair.

The handsome lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

"She was a woman. Wen Clegg's attentions flattered her. And they piqued Lavigne, too. If Lavigne had been indifferent, I dare say there'd have been no zest to the game."

County Officer Monck meanwhile examined the terrain with minute care. Now he stood up and, glancing at the bottles, mentally measured Wendell Clegg's height.

"Clegg's head," he said, "would be almost on a line with the bottles. But how's that? You said, doctor, that shot killed Clegg instantly. Yet he must have staggered thirty feet. With a bullet in his brain he couldn't do that. He'd have dropped like a plummet."

"He did," said Fairgreve.

"Eh?" Both Monck and the coroner stared. "Why, you told me it was an accident. A stray bullet. But thirty feet to one side—— Did any-

thing happen to deflect Lavigne's aim?"

"No."

"Why thirty feet to one side—why, even a poor marksman with an old-fashioned v-sight, at that distance, could hardly make so wide a miss."

Mr. Oakes interpolated, in grouchy tones:

"Lavigne couldn't."

Ross stared, nonplussed, first at the dead man, then at the bottles. He glanced challengingly at Harry Fairgreve. That tall lawyer evaded that glance. No doubt about it, mused Ross. Fairgreve, in his decent-enough anxiety to avoid nasty complications, had put the most favorable construction on what had happened.

"This," said Ross bluntly, "isn't accident. It's murder."

Mr. Oakes, with his habitual lumbering gait, approached the bottles. He regarded the stone wall with a faint show of interest, then turned to the officials with pencil poised.

"May I?"

Ross nodded.

Mr. Oakes went to work. Carefully, without moving the bottles in the slightest, he drew a pencil circle on the flat stone edge, marking the exact spot where each bottle stood.

CHAPTER III

"TUFF" TUFFORD HEARS AND SEES

MURDER? The mere suggestion of such a thing drastically altered the attitude of Coroner Ross and County Officer Monck to their task.

Having determined just where the chief actors in the tragedy had stood, Monck pegged these different spots for future reference. With business-like precision he sketched this portion of the grounds. The two investigators were methodical and exact; in no haste to get through where haste might have meant a misstep.

Taciturn Mr. Oakes proffered a question:

"Where did May Lavigne stand?"

Fairgreve could not remember. He had been watching the bottles. May Lavigne must have been one of the crowd of onlookers grouped close to the house. So, Fairgreve supposed.

He first noticed her after Clegg fell when she ran toward her husband, crying out:

"Oh, why did you do such a thing?"

Having completed his examination of the grounds and given instructions regarding the disposal of the body, the coroner, ensconced in a comfortable chair in the well-lighted living-room, questioned one after another of the witnesses. Monck brought them in one by one, and as each told his or her story and was dismissed, Ross scratched the name from a written list Fairgreve had supplied him.

Monck came and went with the witnesses. Meanwhile, Mr. Granville Oakes, as unemotional as a granite pillar, stood a little in the background making no comment whatever.

Doctor Ross observed him.

"This must be decidedly boring for you, Mr. Oakes," he suggested. "I'm afraid, though, we'll be engaged for a long time. Don't let me keep you here, though, if you feel like looking around the place. I know all this repetition must be tedious."

"Not at all," grumbled Granville Oakes.

"Well," mused Ross, irritably, "if the fellow is satisfied to stay, let him stay." What Oakes got out of listening to this oft-repeated story, the coroner could not surmise.

For it was the same story repeated by witness after witness—the flirtation between Wendell Clegg and May Lavigne, Lavigne's threats, Fairgreve's awkward efforts to turn the

thing into a jesting wager, and the ghastly outcome of the wager.

"Odd," the coroner confided to Monck, "that with so many witnesses we have no one yet who saw Lavigne actually fire the shot."

Fairgreve explained that. The crowd were watching the target, to yell if a hit was made, and, if Lavigne missed, to hiss.

"That was another of my fool ideas," he gloomed. "Of course I saw him fire. But I may be the only one."

Oakes put in a question:

"Did May Lavigne watch her husband?"

"We'll see right away," said Monck. "She's next on our list."

"Unfortunately," commented Ross, "her testimony won't be usable at a trial. A wife can't be compelled to testify against her husband. Not that it's at all vital whether any one saw Lavigne fire the shot. With so much other evidence, that point isn't essential."

"Which way May Lavigne was looking," insisted Oakes, "is vital." He paused. "*To Lavigne,*" he concluded.

Ross glanced at Mr. Granville Oakes, of Pemabec, Maine. What, anyway, was going on in the man's brain? His taciturnity had piqued the coroner's curiosity, so did his scant, somewhat cryptic words.

May Lavigne's pretty face was disfigured with recent tears. Yet, outside this evidence of agitation, she was composed. The coroner already knew her part in the tragedy. With her he had to probe deeper than with the other witnesses.

"You were the cause of this quarrel?"

"Oh, yes." Her tone was apathetic.

"Your husband was jealous?"

"He objected to my coming here for the week-end."

"You were both invited?"

"I was."

"Oh! And Mr. Lavigne came uninvited?"

Ross glanced at Fairgreve. The tall lawyer nodded. Quite plainly, Lavigne, distrustful of Clegg, had pushed himself into a crowd with whom he had nothing in common. The week-end party had tolerated the intruder because his presence added zest to the situation.

The coroner made a wry face. His task was awkward, and May Lavigne showed no disposition to help him. Wherever possible, she answered in monosyllables. Ross put a blunt significant question:

"Had your husband any real ground for jealousy?"

The woman stared at the rug, her pretty face crimson.

"Oh, I understand." Her tone was bitter. "No, not that."

"Now, as to this quarrel?"

"Frank found us together — Wen Clegg and myself. Frank objected."

Ross already had Fairgreve's account of the flirtation, for Fairgreve had been with Lavigne when he found the two together. Coroner Ross shrewdly suspected that Fairgreve had contrived the interruption, in order to break up a flirtation he did not approve. Decent chap, Fairgreve.

THE coroner found that May Lavigne's story of what followed the quarrel between her husband and Clegg tallied almost exactly with Fairgreve's version.

"Now, Mrs. Lavigne," he went on, very slowly, "in what direction were you looking when the shot was fired?"

Oakes had said the answer to that question was vital—to Lavigne. Coroner Ross saw nothing vital at all in it, merely the point as to whether someone else besides Fairgreve had seen Lavigne's finger press the trigger. And, with all this other evidence, it was hardly essential to prove

that explicitly, especially since, unless the woman cared more for Clegg than for her husband, she could not be forced to testify at the trial.

"In what direction was I looking when the shot was fired?" she repeated.

Fairgreve, Monck, even the taciturn Mr. Granville Oakes, were all intent. Ross nodded.

"Why—at my husband."

Oakes was the first to show emotion. He sighed, as though in sheer relief, and wiped his eyes.

"Your husband fired the shot?"

"Yes."

Ross himself felt relief. The point was, just as he had insisted, non-essential; yet, it was well to have evidence that might be available.

If only, he mused, someone of these other witnesses had watched Lavigne instead of the bottles! Any one except this woman. Well, perhaps he would yet find someone who had seen Lavigne's finger press the trigger.

Ross found a moment to puzzle over an entirely inconsequential fact. Oakes had known Lavigne, Oakes was interested in Lavigne. Yet, Oakes had registered very evident relief when May Lavigne admitted watching her husband. And the further admission that she had seen her husband fire the fatal shot had not affected Oakes in the least.

The servants at Graystones had seen nothing of the actual shooting, though the housemaid, Minnie Wallace, was a distant witness of the altercation between Lavigne and Clegg.

She offered a bit of testimony which the week-end guests had tacitly suppressed:

"I thought sure Mr. Lavigne would kill Mr. Clegg on the spot, he was that mad."

Ross, having gone through the list Fairgreve had furnished him, rechecked it, name by name. He turned to Monck:

"See here, did we question Lincoln Tufford?"

Neither Monck nor Fairgreve could recollect questioning Lincoln Tufford. Tufford, too, was an intimate of Wendell Clegg, a closer intimate than most of the crowd. They had, Fairgreve fancied, some business connection.

"I warned everybody to stay at Graystones until you had a chance to question them!" exclaimed Fairgreve.

The house was searched, room by room. Fairgreve suggested that perhaps Tufford, a rather scatter-brained young fellow, had disliked the prospect of questioning and foolishly made a getaway.

"We'll find him," said the coroner grimly. "I'll see Prosecutor Markham and get a warrant, if need be."

But a few minutes later Tufford was found. He was in bed upstairs, fully dressed, snoring lustily.

Fairgreve shook him. He sat up, blinking, then lay down again.

"What you doin' in my room?" he grumbled. "Go 'way." Then, as Fairgreve once more shook him: "You get out of my room."

"As it happens," said Fairgreve, bitingly, "this is Mrs. Lavigne's room."

Tufford blinked. He was a pink-cheeked, rather pleasant-looking young fellow, with a somewhat vacuous face. Now he contrived to sit up, stared at the articles of feminine adornment on the dresser, and sheepishly got to his feet.

"May won't mind," he mumbled. "She's a good sport." With Fairgreve supporting him, he lurched toward the door. "What d'you want to wake me for, anyway?" he concluded aggrievedly. "And"—for the first time he noticed Monck—"what's the speed cop doin' here?"

"Come downstairs to the living-room." Monck's tone was business-like. Then, as they ushered Tufford into the coroner's presence: "We

want you to tell what you know about this affair. Did you see the shot fired?"

"What shot?"

At a glance Coroner Ross took in the situation. "Another drunken bum who calls himself a gentleman," he mused. "And this sort of thing inherits America, and occupies the headlines in our newspapers. Faugh!" "What shot?" he repeated. "The shot that killed Wendell Clegg."

"Gee!" exclaimed Tufford. "Did Frank Lavigne kill him? I didn't see that. But I was up at the window when I heard the shot and saw the flash."

Granville Oakes took a step forward.

"Saw the flash and heard the shot?" he interjected.

"No," insisted Tufford, still stupid from much drinking. "I tried to get out with the crowd, but I was too drunk. So I got Perk Perkins to help me up here. Goo' servant, Perkins! I lay down on the bed and stared out the window after Perkins left, and listened to 'em wrangling down on the lawn. I didn't get much of what was said, only I heard someone say: 'One—two—three—fire!' Then—zip—I heard the shot and saw the flash."

"You," Ross spoke with biting contempt, "must have been pretty drunk?"

"I'll say so. Poor old Wen! So he's dead. Why, darn it, he was going to tell me who his bootlegger was, and now he can't. It's the deuce of a note!"

"That will do!" Ross peremptorily dismissed the man.

Tufford, still maundering against Clegg's lack of consideration in getting himself killed before he could tell about the bootlegger, was hustled out and, doubtless, back to bed.

"Pretty drunk," commented the coroner to Mr. Granville Oakes. "Oh, well, he's one witness, besides Mrs. Lavigne and Mrs. Fairgreve, who saw the actual shot fired. He heard the shot and saw the flash. That helps."

"Yet," remarked Oakes, cryptically, "sight travels faster than sound."

"Eh? Oh, I get you, Mr. Oakes. Well, you can appreciate that Tufford got things a bit mixed. Unquestionably, he was pretty drunk."

CHAPTER IV

MR. OAKES AROUSES SUSPICION

THE coroner's rather sketchy preliminary investigation was over. He stood with Monck and Harry Fairgreve in the vast living-room at Graystones, discussing the next move.

In the background, white-haired, rosy-cheeked, taciturn Mr. Granville Oakes, of Pemabec, Maine, hung like a persistent shadow. So accustomed had the other men grown to his presence, they no longer realized that he was there.

"Oh, by the way, Fairgreve," exclaimed the coroner, "whose rifle? Lavigne's?"

"Eh? No. The rifle belonged to Clegg."

The weapon lay before them on the table. First the coroner, then Monck, casually examined it.

"Small-bore rifle," commented Monck. "Adjustable peep-sights. Clegg was a marksman, eh?"

"Yes," explained Fairgreve. "Wen Clegg enjoyed shooting, but wanted a good weapon and good sights. There are several rifles in the house," he added, "but when Lavigne needed one, I got him the best. You see, I did not intend Lavigne to miss, if I could help it."

"Uh-huh!" grunted the coroner, his mind already busy with arrangements for the formal inquest.

Mr. Granville Oakes drifted for-

ward and, with wordless deference, examined the rifle.

"Better lock this up, doctor," he suggested.

"Monck will take charge of it," said Coroner Ross. "I'll have to arrange now for the inquest. Send the body down to the Milford morgue, empanel a jury there, and arrange to get the witnesses down. I suppose they all have cars——"

"Why not here?"

The suggestion came from Mr. Oakes. The coroner, his lips parted for a prompt and decisive negative, abruptly changed his mind.

"A good idea, Mr. Oakes. It's easier to bring twelve jurors up here than to take a score and more witnesses down to Milford. The jury must view the locality, anyway. Leave those bottles just where they are. Who's in charge of Graystones? You, Fairgreve? Well, you'll have to keep your crowd here over Monday."

"They're busy people," objected Fairgreve. "Most of them have to get away first thing Monday morning."

"They won't this Monday morning," commented the relentless coroner. "The best I can do for them is to clean up the business in the one day. If," he told Monck, "anyone insists on getting away, you'd better put him in the Milford lock-up for safekeeping."

Monck spoke:

"I'll keep a man right on the ground. The minute I get back to Milford, I'll send Boggs up here."

He pondered, asking himself, manifestly, what of the interval before Boggs could get to Graystones.

"Till then," concluded Monck bruskly, "I guess Mr. Oakes can hold the fort."

Oakes assented with a dumb nod, and settled himself in an easy-chair, to hold the fort.

Fairgreve accompanied the other men down to their car.

"Rather an odd fish, your friend Oakes," he commented. "Who is he, anyway?"

"He's a country lawyer from a little backwoods town named Pemabec, up in Maine. Aside from his practice, his only interests seem to be abstract studies in physics and mathematics. Lavigne came from somewhere near Pemabec."

The recollection gave the county officer a momentary hint of uneasiness.

"I'm wondering if Oakes is exactly the man to leave here. He impressed me as honest, but——"

He halted, indecisive.

"Don't tell anyone," he whispered to the others, "but, doctor, immediately after you reach Milford, send Boggs and Jephson up here. Then I'll go down to Milford and help you drum up a jury. Meanwhile, I'll stay here, on the q. t. I'll keep an eye on our friend Oakes, without his knowing it."

For a quarter of an hour Mr. Granville Oakes, of Pemabec, remained almost immobile in the living-room at Graystones. From where he sat, a small atom of humanity in the vast room, he had a full view of the terrace where the tragedy had occurred.

At the end of fifteen minutes he rose, went to the door, and beckoned the maid, Minnie Wallace.

"Send Mrs. Lavigne here," he commanded.

The maid returned presently with the message that Mrs. Lavigne had a headache and begged to be excused.

"Oh!" The country lawyer's manner was almost pleasant. "Tell her, please, it's Mr. Granville Oakes."

That message brought May Lavigne. She had, plainly, been weeping; she regarded her persecutor apathetically.

Oakes, as she entered, bowed deeply, after the fashion of a half-century

ago, and silently motioned Mrs. Lavigne to a seat.

Anxiously she regarded him.

"When did you get here?" she demanded. "Why did you come? And—what do you want with me?"

"When did I get here? Perhaps too late. Perhaps just in time. Well?"

"You know what he — Frank — did?"

"I heard all the witnesses, if that's what you mean." In the feminine presence, Mr. Oakes grew almost loquacious. "Now, how far has this thing gone?"

She flushed.

"I answered that to the coroner," she stiffly rejoined.

Oakes looked hard at her. She was pretty, in a fair, fluffy, coquettish way. She reminded this phlegmatic country lawyer of a flower—a flower delicate of texture, sadly wilted, yet a flower nevertheless.

"You also answered it to me," he said.

"To you?" She was all surprise.

"For me, that was the most vital point in the questioning. It determined whether I stayed here to help, or went away and left Frank Lavigne to the electric chair."

She clasped her hands in terror.

"And," she breathed, "you're staying?"

He nodded.

"But how can you help him?"

Oakes shrugged his shoulders. He was not answering that question.

"If only," she muttered, "Frank had never come here; if he had never let me come——"

"Could he prevent you?" Oakes's tone grew biting. "I did warn him," he added. "I told him: 'If that woman prefers that crowd to you, let her go'."

May Lavigne's look grew hard and sullen. Then, rebelliously, her eyes flashed.

"You call yourself his friend?" she bitterly exclaimed. "You think I was foolish and flighty? You blame me for getting him into this? You can't understand that, if there's one thing a woman hates, it's this eternal tutelage—this being told what she must and must not do. You call yourself Frank's friend? Oh, yes. You consider me his worst enemy? But will you go as far for him, or do as much, as I mean to do?"

"What?"

"Swear that—that his finger never pressed the trigger."

"You told the coroner he fired the shot."

"Well?"

"You told the truth?"

"Well?"

Oakes stared at her. This feminine ebullition was, seemingly, beyond him.

His eyes strayed about the room. The doors were closed, except the archway into the main hall, which was covered by heavy portieres. Oakes let his stolid eyes rest a moment on those portieres.

Then he turned to May Lavigne.

"You'd perjure yourself—to what end?"

"No one else saw him fire the shot?"

She did not know, then, of Lincoln Tufford's befuddled testimony? Oakes smiled. The woman, he mused, was desperate—perhaps with remorse for the catastrophe her seemingly innocent flirtation had brought. She wildly hoped that, even with such a cloud of witnesses, her swearing to a lie might save her husband.

"You see," she said, "if I swear I watched him all the time, and his finger never pressed the trigger, what can they do?"

"Perjury," commented Oakes, tersely, "won't save Frank Lavigne. More than that, I think perjury will now prove impossible."

He rose, and, apparently in profound thought, aimlessly paced the

room. Presently, halting near the portieres, he snatched them abruptly aside.

"Come right in, Monck," he invited.

The eavesdropping county officer, with assumed nonchalance, shambled into the room. He did not look at May Lavigne; he missed her sudden pallor. But he could not miss the despairing cry with which she dropped into a chair and sank her fair head on the table.

"Monck," said Mr. Oakes, with terse briskness, "this is opportune. When you get back to Milford, find me a rifle exactly identical with Clegg's weapon, equipped with exactly the same sort of sights, also a box of cartridges. See that they get here for me the first thing Monday morning, if you have to send a special messenger to New York for them."

"All right," grunted Monck.

"You heard Mrs. Lavigne?" added Oakes.

"I did. You did me a good turn there, Mr. Oakes. But . . ."

He let his suspicions trail away into silence. Monck had come to very much doubt the bona fides of this taciturn, slow moving but singularly perceptive Mr. Oakes of Pemabec.

CHAPTER V

"TUFF" TUFFORD'S ANTECEDENTS

IN HALF an hour, two officers, Boggs and Jephson, arrived to relieve Monck, who drove down to Milford to assist the coroner in his preparations for the inquest next day.

Boggs, apparently, was detailed to keep an eye on the house party, and, in particular, to see that the stone-walled quadrangle, where the shooting took place, was not invaded or disturbed. Jephson's task was to accompany Lavigne wherever he went and to see that he did not go too far; moreover, to insure that no one talked to him.

Lavigne, though, was seemingly too completely crushed to attempt a getaway. Part of the time he strayed moodily about the grounds, Jephson at his heels, but for the most part he kept to his rooms.

When Mr. Granville Oakes presently sought an interview with Lavigne, Jephson pleasantly but firmly warned him aside.

"When Mr. Monck comes," he added, "I'll refer the request to him, sir, and he can do as he pleases; but till I've authority from Monck or the coroner, no one can talk to Mr. Lavigne."

"Very well."

Stolid as ever, Oakes sought to reexamine the stone-walled terrace. Boggs, just as politely obdurate, barred his way there.

So Oakes drifted aimlessly about the house. The guests, a few hours before so frivolously light-hearted, gathered in little knots, discussing the tragedy, or, more often, complaining bitterly against the ukase that promised to hold them at Graystones a day longer than they had expected.

Oakes spoke to none. Besides being slow and lumbering, his movements were exceedingly quiet. He drifted here and there, his hands clasped behind him, his head sunk forward, seemingly immersed in his own far-flung thoughts.

Next morning, however, came a change. Monck arrived with another officer to relieve Boggs and Jephson. A bit derisively he handed Oakes the rifle and cartridges he had asked for.

"Here's your artillery," he jested.

"Thank you! Now, let me see Clegg's rifle."

Oakes examined the weapon carefully; then, after adjusting the sights on his own weapon, handed Clegg's back to the officer. He sought the gardener, Linnett.

"Where," he asked, "did Mr. Clegg carry on his rifle practice?"

The man blinked at him.

"I beg your pardon, sir."

It was hard for Oakes to explain what he wanted in a few words, almost as hard for him as to use many words. Eventually, he took a footpath through the woods fringing the Graystones estate, and at last, finding a secluded, rock-walled glen, spent nearly an hour in sedulous target practice with a row of small stones on a rock shelf.

Presently, putting up the rifle, he returned to the house. Doctor Ross and the jurors had already arrived, and the inquest was now under way in the big living-room. Mr. Granville Oakes bowed to the coroner. A trifle of his taciturnity dropped from him.

"Doctor," he said, pleasantly enough, "for lack of a better lawyer, I would like to represent Mr. Lavigne. May I have a recess of a few minutes to confer with him?"

At the end of the few minutes the jurors were led out to the quadrangle to inspect the scene of the tragedy. The six bottles still occupied their position on the stone step. Pegs driven into the greensward indicated where Clegg, Lavigne, Fairgreve and the rest of the party had stood. Mr. Oakes, as was due the counsel for the suspect, closely accompanied coroner and jurors.

"I," he explained, "yesterday drew those circles about the bottles. You see they stand now just as they stood then. You will also notice, gentlemen, this spot in the wall behind them and a little to the right where the stone is freshly chipped. I have prepared a sketch of the grounds which I will ask to put in as an exhibit."

Even in his professional capacity, Mr. Oakes was reasonably terse.

The inquest proceeded. The doctors detailed to examine the body described the course of the bullet. It had entered the left temple and followed a diagonal but not downward course toward the right ear.

Oakes let the medical witnesses go without questioning.

The evidence followed the line of the previous day's sketchy inquiry. But Monck and the coroner, for reasons of their own, doubtless suggested by Markham, the Prosecuting Attorney, who was present, had reversed the procedure.

So the first witness called was Lincoln Tufford, the one individual who, outside Mrs. Lavigne herself, had actually seen Lavigne fire the shot. Sober this morning, he stuck to his story.

"I heard the shot; I saw the flash; then I just went off to sleep."

"You were drunk?" asked Oakes.

"A bit, but not too drunk to hear the shot and see the flash."

"Are you aware," pursued Oakes, "that sight travels faster than sound?"

"Eh? What?"

Oakes, after a moment's deliberation, elucidated:

"At a mile distance, or more, you would see the flash, and it would be gone before the sound of the shot would reach you."

"This," interpolated Prosecuting Attorney Markham, "was at a few hundred yards distance, Mr. Oakes."

"Less than that. But," argued Oakes, stubbornly, "the witness could not get so close that he would hear the report of the rifle before he saw the flash. At the very nearest they would seem simultaneous."

Lincoln Tufford's knowledge of illicit booze was comprehensive, his acquaintance with feminine caprice was almost unique, but his scientific knowledge fell far short of the very

common truism Oakes had enunciated.

"I heard the shot," insisted Mr. Tufford, "and I saw the flash."

Mr. Granville Oakes smiled. That smile made his rosy, homely face glow like a newly risen sun.

"You came here Friday night," he pursued, "nominally a guest at the week-end party, but really to discuss a matter of business with Mr. Clegg?"

"Ye-es."

"Explain the business."

Tufford hesitated. The prosecuting attorney objected. Mr. Tufford's business here had no bearing on the tragedy under investigation.

But, to the coroner, bitter against the Graystones crowd and all they represented, Tufford's reluctance was evidence that the question should be not merely asked but answered. And the coroner's word was law.

"I—oh—well, Mr. Clegg and I were in a sort of deal—and—ah——

"May I be permitted to help the witness?" Oakes was singularly bland. "You, Mr. Tufford, had Clegg's backing for a mining venture. He—as you saw it—wanted to welsh. If you were to be saved from financial wreck, Clegg had to come across within the next few months. You could make him live up to his obligations by process of law; but he could protract the litigation till a favorable verdict wouldn't save you. Well, you came up here to talk things over with him, and ended worse off than you began. Clegg said he'd law you from here to hades before he'd give in, and if you wanted the money, the quickest way would be to collect it from his estate."

All present gazed hard at Tufford. The implication of that question was plain enough.

"It's true," admitted Tufford. "Clegg was a damned welsher, and I came up here to make him deliver."

"You threatened him?"

"I got drinking and—yes, I threatened him. But of course I didn't mean——"

"After the shooting," pursued Oakes, bland but relentless, "in whose room were you discovered?"

"Mrs. Lavigne's."

"Does this room overlook the quadrangle where Clegg was shot?"

A moment earlier Coroner Ross had felt that Oakes was stupidly venturing on a wild-goose chase. Now he revealed new interest.

"When the others went outside," pursued Oakes, "why did you go upstairs?"

"I—oh, I reckoned I'd be better off to bed."

"Then why not to your own room on the opposite side of the house?"

Monck and the Prosecuting Attorney were whispering. The coroner was next included.

"I—I guess I was too drunk to know where I went, after Perk Perkins got me upstairs."

Tufford was plainly anxious; he breathed hard; he regarded this grim, strange questioner with bulging, affrightened eyes. "I s'pose," he burst forth, "you mean to say I shot Wen Clegg? Well, I didn't. Lavigne held the gun that shot him. I heard the shot. I saw the flash."

"And," repeated Oakes, with ironic insistence, "sight travels faster than sound."

The prosecuting attorney took up the questioning.

"You own a rifle? Did you have it with you?"

"N-no."

"Where was it?"

"In my room."

"On the opposite side of the hall," softly commented Mr. Granville Oakes.

CHAPTER VI

WHAT ABOUT MRS. CLEGG?

WHEN Lincoln Tufford, perspiring, stepped down, Mr. Oakes remembered something.

"Mr. Coroner, I omitted before to put in that sketch I mentioned. May I do so now?"

Doctor Ross assented.

He did not entirely approve of Mr. Granville Oakes. This white-haired, rosy-cheeked, slow-moving country lawyer from Pemabec was not playing the game. Or, rather, he was playing the game with too deliberate and obvious intent to inject, into this perfectly clear case, an element of unjustified doubt.

Ross was no automaton. He had his human feelings. In his estimation Lavigne had done what almost any husband would have done. Wendell Clegg was a beastly bounder, who simply got what was coming to him.

But Lavigne, and Lavigne's lawyer, ought, in common decency, to admit the shot, and base the defence on a plea of justification. To try to unload suspicion upon an innocent man was hardly playing the game.

For Ross had seen Lincoln Tufford the previous day; he still believed Tufford's drunken somnolence was no pretence; Tufford, whatever he had seen from that window, was too drunk to take steady aim at Wendell Clegg.

But Mr. Granville Oakes was explaining his plan of the grounds.

"Here, you see, is the stone wall. The bottles stood here, on this step. This *X* marks the spot, about thirty feet to the right, where Clegg stood. Here, Lavigne. Here, close against the house, these crosses indicate the rest of the crowd, including, I believe, Mrs. Lavigne. These circles represent shrubbery."

"And this cross?"

"Behind the shrubbery? Mr. Fairgreve stood there when he counted."

The plan was perfectly clear. It corresponded almost exactly with the one Monck had prepared.

"Now, here," pursued Oakes, "I indicate a place where the stone wall, behind and a little to the right of the bottles, is freshly nicked. That nick I claim is the mark of a bullet, and it is recent. Observe a bullet-mark on the stone, perhaps fired that same day, and—the bullet that killed Clegg was found in his head."

He bowed to the coroner.

"I put in this plan," he concluded, and sat down.

Markham, a trifle puzzled, proceeded doggedly with his evidence. Oakes questioned few of the witnesses. He asked just one question of the old beau, Clive Potts.

"Mr. Clegg's wife divorced him?"

"She secured separation papers, sir.

Oakes made as though to ask another question, then thought better of it. Presently he questioned Fairgreve along the same line.

Fairgreve, as Clegg's lawyer and man of business, knew Clegg's affairs more intimately than did anyone else. He explained that Clegg and his wife had lived apart for some years. She *hated* him. Fairgreve stressed that word. But she had refused to gratify him by getting a divorce.

"Clegg," pursued Oakes, "was fond of rifle practice?"

"I believe so."

"This was his rifle?"

"Yes. Bought in New York last week."

"He selected it himself?"

"He was very anxious," said Fairgreve, "to get a certain type of weapon for target work."

"You knew Mrs. Clegg?"

"I did."

"Was she—er—at all handy with a rifle?"

Coroner Ross frowned. Once more he secretly questioned the tactics of

Mr. Oakes. Mr. Oakes, in the coroner's private opinion, would have been well advised to pivot his entire defence on justification.

He had, however, to give Mr. Oakes his own stupid, headstrong way, secretly hoping that at his trial Frank Lavigne's defence would be handled by more judicious and intelligent counsel.

Fairgreve answered the question: "I believe she was reputed a pretty fair shot."

Oakes sat down abruptly. He drew a pad to him, and immersed himself in intricate calculations, apparently oblivious to the further questioning.

He did not even trouble to cross-question May Lavigne.

Again the secretly sympathetic coroner was deeply perturbed. Oakes was stupid; but surely not so stupid as not to know how essential it was to establish, in the public mind, a picture of May Lavigne, a loving and devoted wife, pursued by unwelcome attentions from Wendell Clegg.

That May Lavigne was not a loving and devoted wife, and that Wendell Clegg's attentions were really welcome, made no difference. There, argued Ross, was the one possible defence, and it was the business of Mr. Granville Oakes to establish it as quickly as he could.

But Mr. Granville Oakes, with stolid, stupid indifference, sat calculating laboriously, and gave May Lavigne's testimony no attention.

The prosecuting attorney finished, Oakes called Lavigne. The young man was haggard but composed. His story was in line with the testimony of the other witnesses. It told of his jealousy of Clegg, the quarrel, Fairgreve's jesting suggestion of a wager, and the fatal shot.

"Now, Mr. Lavigne"—Oakes was exceedingly deliberate—"when you fired that shot, for what did you aim?"

"For the second bottle from the extreme right of the row."

"You are a good marksman?"

"Yes."

"At that distance have you ever in recent years missed such a target?"

"Never."

"Can you explain how you came to miss on this occasion by"—Mr. Oakes deliberated—"a matter of fifteen inches?"

The auditors stared.

"Thirty feet and more," protested the prosecuting attorney.

"Fifteen inches," repeated Mr. Oakes. "How did you miss that much—you, who are a sure shot at such a target, at that distance?"

"I don't know," said Lavigne.

"My learned friend," said Mr. Oakes, gravely, "has the privilege of cross-questioning you. But if he will defer that privilege for a few moments I will save him the necessity by putting in my one other witness, who will clear up the entire matter."

"One witness?"

"His name," blandly pursued the lawyer from Pemabec, "is Granville Oakes."

CHAPTER VII

MR. OAKES GROWS LOQUACIOUS

MR. GRANVILLE OAKES was accordingly sworn in as a witness.

"We will make more rapid progress, Mr. Coroner," he volunteered, "if I tell my story in my own way, subject, of course, to later cross-questioning."

Doctor Ross assented.

"Furthermore, I could submit a second sketch, but I suggest that instead we revisit the actual scene of the murder. Officer Monck, will you please bring Clegg's rifle?"

Coroner Ross noticed that Oakes stressed the word *murder*. So he

perhaps was not, as his earlier questioning had suggested, planning to claim that the shot was accidental.

In the stone-walled quadrangle, Oakes once more carefully pointed out and identified for the jurors the pegged locations, where Clegg, Lavigne, Fairgreve and the crowd had stood; as well as the window from which Lincoln Tufford had looked drunkenly down and "heard the sound and seen the flash."

How different the scene now from that less than twenty-four hours earlier, when the crowd in their intoxicated revelry ran out here to witness a wager with a woman as the stake? Despite their habitual frivolity, they were, this time, sober and serious enough.

"I will," said Oakes, deliberately, "ask Officer Brown to stand where Mr. Clegg stood. Mr. Lavigne will take his place, here; Mr. Fairgreve, stand back of those shrubs, please; you, Mr. Tufford, go up to that window. The rest take the places you occupied yesterday. Remain there till I tell you to move. Now, Mr. Coroner, gentlemen of the inquest, I shall explain. Observe these bottles. Mr. Lavigne aimed at this one."

Oakes indicated but did not touch the second bottle from the right.

"Officer Brown, remember, impersonates Mr. Clegg. Mr. Lavigne, please take this rifle, and aim. No, don't be afraid, Brown. The rifle is mine, and it is not loaded. The second bottle, Mr. Lavigne."

Monck uttered a quick exclamation.

"You're not aiming at all."

Lavigne flushed.

"I am," he protested. "The sights are clearly in line with the target."

Oakes, crossing to Lavigne, examined the rifle.

"Mr. Lavigne," he explained to the coroner, "is an accurate marksman. If he aimed at that second bottle, he would hit. If he aimed at Clegg, he would hit. But if he used a rifle with an adjustable peep sight that had been tampered with, his aim would be deflected ever so slightly. If he fired at Clegg, he would miss by a few inches. If he fired at that bottle, he would miss by a few inches."

"You mean," the coroner demanded, "that Lavigne did fire at the bottle, but, because the sights were defective, he hit Clegg? Accident, eh?"

Mr. Oakes shook his head.

"If," he said, the sights were shifted sufficiently for the shot to hit Clegg, thirty feet to one side, Lavigne would have noticed at once that something was wrong with them. The shifting was imperceptible, the shot was only slightly deflected, the nick on the stone wall proves just how much. Mr. Monck, will you examine the sights on Clegg's rifle?"

Monck did so. He nodded excitedly to the coroner.

"Right enough," he ejaculated.

"Meaning, that whatever mark Lavigne aimed at, he must miss. This morning I adjusted the sights on my rifle to correspond exactly with those on Clegg's weapon. I spent nearly an hour trying to determine just how far a weapon with sights so adjusted would miss at this precise distance. Now, individual marksmen differ in their methods; a good marksman always allows for wind and mirage, though these would not be considerable factors at so short a range. But as nearly as I could determine, the miss would be fifteen inches to the right, which brings Lavigne's bullet here."

He indicated the spot on the stone wall, a little to the right of the bottles, where the stone was freshly chipped.

"If, with that rifle, at that distance, Lavigne shot Clegg, the shot must have been accidental. For if he deliberately aimed at Clegg, he could not help but miss."

"But what became of the bullet?"

protested Monck. "It hit the stone wall, you say; then it must have fallen on this side."

"No use looking now," calmly interposed Oakes.

"But," protested the coroner, "no one has entered the quadrangle except ourselves since Clegg was shot."

"Except," said Oakes, "at the moment Clegg fell. Then, naturally, everybody ran to him. You'd best get the names of those who reached him first. One of them assuredly picked up Lavigne's bullet. The same man who tampered with the sights."

"Tufford?" challenged the prosecutor, skeptically.

"I think not. Mr. Tufford was high above Clegg. A shot fired from the window at that distance might strike the left temple, but would travel downward, toward the base of the brain. This shot traveled almost on the level, but diagonally, from left to right. Like all the rest of the crowd, except Tufford and Mrs. Lavigne, Clegg was watching the bottles to see at once the result of the shot. If Lavigne's bullet had hit, it would probably hit the left side of the head and travel, not diagonally, but directly across. Assuming Clegg watched the bottles— Turn your head, Officer Brown!"

Oakes patiently adjusted the officer's willing but rather uncomprehending head.

"Now," he went on, "trace the bullet backward from its destination to its source. Here"—he indicated Brown's right ear—"through here." He tapped Brown's left temple. That gives you a straight line, Mr. Coroner. Project that line, and it will touch the point from which the bullet was fired. The line, you will observe"—stooping, he traced it on the greensward with twine—"passes a considerable distance to the left of where Lavigne stood."

The coroner was puzzled. He had, despite his conviction that Tufford was too drunk to take steady aim, come pretty close to suspecting Tufford. Now he recalled those vague hints let drop regarding the discarded Mrs. Clegg.

"You mean, Mr. Oakes, the shot may have been fired from a considerably greater distance—perhaps beyond the wall—by someone else—by" —he blurted it out—"by Mrs. Clegg?"

"Mrs. Clegg," remarked Oakes, "would hardly do that. She was rid of Clegg, he paid her a generous separation allowance, and his death would bring her nothing additional, since she had signed away her dower. Mr. Fairgreve's information in regard to their attitude toward one another was, I am afraid, hardly accurate. Far from hating Mr. Clegg for his conduct, Mrs. Clegg regarded it with complete equanimity. The situation, I imagine, gave her a larger measure of freedom."

Prosecuting Attorney Markham intervened.

"See here, Mr. Oakes," he argued, "isn't this pretty much supposition? Why, Mr. Clegg himself used the rifle for target shooting. He just got it a few days before. He may have fired the bullet that chipped the stone."

Oakes regarded him almost sadly.

"Not supposition, Mr. Markham. Calculation. Mathematical calculation. If," he pursued, "Mr. Clegg indulged in target practice, he would do so regularly in some one place. This, I admit, is the ideal place, with a stone wall to stop the bullet; but if Mr. Clegg had used it, the stone would be repeatedly chipped and the ground sown with bullets. When I asked Linnett, the gardener, this morning where Mr. Clegg practiced shooting, he simply stared in amazement. 'He never had a gun, sir,' he told me."

"But Mr. Fairgreve said——?"

"Mr. Fairgreve," murmured Oakes, meditatively, "did tell us that, didn't

he? Mr. Fairgreve, whose salary from Mr. Clegg was only moderate, has, I believe, been living rather expensively. I just wonder if Mr. Clegg ever threatened him with an accounting for moneys entrusted to him. Did he, Mr. Fairgreve?"

Monck stared at the unresponsive shrubbery.

"Why, where *is* Fairgreve?" he demanded, in astonishment.

Mr. Oakes smiled ever so slightly.

"I fancy he must have slipped away," he observed. "I thought I heard a car a few minutes ago. Please don't let his absence distract our attention from the business in hand. I am now ready for cross-questioning."

CHAPTER VIII

MR. OAKES ONCE MORE GROWS TACITURN

"YOU, Frank," Mr. Granville Oakes told Lavigne, "honestly believed you killed Clegg. And so did you"—he turned to contrite May. "I thought so myself, until I heard Tufford's first testimony. Tufford was pretty drunk, but Tufford's befuddled brain did retain one clear impression—that the sound of the shot preceded the flash of Frank's revolver.

"What he did hear, I suppose, was Fairgreve's shot from behind the shrubbery. Fairgreve's finger pressed the trigger exactly on the word 'Fire!' It took the word a fraction of a second to reach you, Frank. So your flash followed the other report, which, of course, came so close to yours that the two sounds blended.

"I had to explain two puzzling features, that bullet nick in the stone, and how a good marksman like Frank Lavigne missed that bottle by fifteen inches. The explanation came when I examined Clegg's rifle. The sights had been tampered with. You know that I did . . .

"What other facts I needed, I picked up last night, mooning about the house and the porch, listening-in on confidential gossip not intended for me. I found, then, that Fairgreve was lying. I found, then and later, that Fairgreve had lied about Clegg's fondness for shooting. I was able, from what I overheard, to catch him in the lie he told today when he spoke of enmity between Clegg and his wife. If Fairgreve lied, he would lie for but one purpose—the same purpose that had led him to order the rifle in Clegg's name and later tamper with the sights. The gossip I heard was that Fairgreve, a supposedly poor man, had been spending a great deal of money and gambling heavily. Where did he get the money? The inference was easy."

"Then why let him get away?"

"Get the start of the police, you mean? Oh, I argued that if he were guilty, a hint of my disclosures would start him running, and that this running away would be pretty much a confession of guilt."

"Will they catch him?" May Lavigne voiced the question.

"What happens to Fairgreve," said Mr. Granville Oakes, pointedly, "is a matter of complete indifference to me. My sole interest here is in two young people with their lives before them. And my advice is this—if you can't go back with me to staid old Pemabec, carry enough of the Pemabec tradition with you to keep you clear of flirtatious grass-widowers and week-end crowds like this."

May Lavigne, sobbing with intense relief, threw her arms about Mr. Granville Oakes.

"You're the best friend we ever had," she cried, "and I can't begin to thank you."

Mr. Oakes firmly disengaged her.

"Then don't," he grumbled.

He had relapsed into taciturnity.

The Affair of the Raven

By DALE COLLINS

The first of a series of short stories retailing the startling adventures of PETER LAMB.

THE document by which "We, George Nathaniel, Marquess Curzon of Kedleston, Earl of Kedleston, Viscount Scarsdale, Baron Ravensdale, Knight of the Most Noble Order of the Garter," etc., requested and required, in the name of His Majesty, all whom it might concern to allow Peter Lamb to pass freely, without let or hindrance, contained the information that Mr. Lamb was forty years of age, born at Brixton and by profession a designer of stained glass. When it went on further to request and require every assistance and protection of which Mr. Lamb might stand in need, it opened up a wide range of possibilities.

For Mr. Lamb was very small, very slight, with hair graying and eyes of faded blue. He wore gold-rimmed pince-nez, a sad mustache, and an expression of wonder and innocence. His manners were gentle, and he put trust in strangers. Such a man wandering in the Malay Archipelago palpably stood in need of all the protection which could be requested by his national foster-father.

When Mr. Lamb appeared on the companion-ladder of a ship, in immaculate ducks and spotless topee and carrying a neatly folded green sun-umbrella, it was the signal for sampan boys to rush their rates up. When he stepped onto the dock the venders of curios flocked about him in swarming legions. When he peeped into the smoking-room, men who had no amateur status at the card-table sang psalms of joy. In this fashion Mr. Lamb passed through the swarming and voracious East, with only his very innocence standing between him and disaster.

As he himself explained, he was fulfilling the ambition of a lifetime in taking that tour. His eyes, the eyes of a dreamer from a quiet cathedral city, would gleam with a light from within, as he spoke of all it meant to him. The worldy-wise marveled. But Mr. Lamb did not know anything about that.

Thus it chanced that Mr. Peter Lamb landed from the Dutch packet at Suracassar in the brightness of the morning. He peered about him as he did so, interested and bewildered. The delighted peddlers pounced upon him with souvenirs pillaged from the ruined Buddhist temple outside the town, which, most obviously, he had come to admire.

A STRING orchestra played a fox-trot at a pace suitable to the needs of large Dutchmen and larger

Dutch ladies in the tropics. Mr. Lamb blinked about him in evident enjoyment. Suracassar was proud of its *Soceiteit de Harmonie*, and with good cause, for it was a fine white stone building which would not have disgraced a town three times the size. The social life of the port centered in the club, which was really a casino with ballroom, bar, café and gambling rooms. It was pleasant here in the warm night with many lights and nimble Malays hurrying with drinks.

"A gay scene, a very gay scene," said Mr. Lamb happily, though it was manifest that he was a little dazzled and awed by the brilliance and noise.

"I am pleased that you are pleased, monsieur," said Mr. Lamb's friend of a day, M. Vence.

M. Vence was like a raven, smooth, dark and bright-eyed, his manners quick and sharp, his hands very soft and white, at the same time suggesting claws. M. Vence, indeed, was so very like a raven that a whisper was running all round the room and many amused and a few indignant eyes regarded the table at which he sat with Mr. Lamb.

One of the ship's officers had spread the visitor's name, and the whisper chuckled over the aptness of the name and wondered what the raven's beak would do. Mr. Lamb, however, did not know anything about that. He judged M. Vence as he found him, and M. Vence seemed altogether charming and most hospitable to the stranger of another race.

In accordance with the express wish of Lord Curzon, M. Vence was doing very well by Peter Lamb. Following their chance meeting at the ruins he had taken his friend to the *soceiteit*. He had regaled him with a very good dinner and a bottle of very good wine, and now he sat with him in the ballroom, attentive, interested and affable, while his guest expanded.

It was a happy party, for Mr. Lamb was enraptured with M. Vence, who, in turn, could have burned joss-sticks before the gods of chance which had sent him such a prize.

At intervals Mr. Lamb was persuaded into having another whisky *sa-tengah*, and, as the evening proceeded and the band still played and the couples mazed about, he made it clear that in all his wanderings he had not met one dearer to his heart than M. Vence. M. Vence admitted that the knowledge gave him the pleasure indescribable. So they had another drink.

"In your wanderings, monsieur," said the host, "it is no doubt that you have had many strange adventures?"

"Indeed, yes," said Mr. Lamb. "Stranger things have happened to me in the past six months than I could have conceived were possible."

M. Vence was all ears for his friend's experiences. He listened to them eagerly.

"Your travelings must cost a great sum," he remarked at an appropriate moment.

"Much more than I expected," Mr. Lamb admitted, "but it's worth it." He grew confidential. "It is not all loss, however. I have been fortunate." Under the influence of such hospitality Mr. Lamb's knowing little wink was understandable.

"Ah, monsieur, I am charmed, delighted, to hear of you this!" M. Vence exclaimed with animation. "And the good fortune?"

Mr. Lamb grew shy.

"It was nothing," he murmured modestly.

"But come, monsieur, now that you have aroused my curiosity! Stay, we shall have some refreshment, and

then, if you wish, you shall tell me the story!"

"Really!" Mr. Lamb protested, but he could not hope to dam the torrent of hospitality.

The drink was not wasted. Mr. Lamb expanded further.

"I hope," he remarked, "that my reticence did not annoy you?"

"No, no!" M. Vence declared lightly.

"The truth is, the incident reflects but little credit on me. It happened in Thursday Island. I was at Thursday Island, as I told you."

"Ah!" exclaimed M. Vence intelligently. "Thursday Island. Where the pearls come from, is it not?" His eyes were deep and dark as twin wells.

"Where the pearls come from," Mr. Lamb agreed, but shamefacedly. "They were kind to me there. I'm afraid I repaid them poorly." He sat shaking his head, while M. Vence waited alertly. "It was the purest stroke of fortune, sir, and the saddest temptation. It was, I honestly believe, the kind of thing which might happen once in a century." Again he hesitated.

"I am all attention, monsieur," M. Vence announced, and he spoke the truth.

"It reflects no credit on me," Mr. Lamb reiterated, "but the flesh is weak. I was aboard a lugger when they were opening shells. I picked an oyster at random to study it. It was open. Nobody was looking. From idle curiosity I put my finger into it. I found—I found—this!"

While he spoke Mr. Lamb fumbled in a very deep pocket inside his waistcoat and drew out a matchbox. M. Vence leaned forward as if about to peck at whatever the box contained. His eyes rounded as he beheld Mr. Lamb's treasure. It was a pearl — a big pearl of magnificent lustre and quality, a pearl fit to be the central stone in a rajah's crown.

M. Vence knew a little about everything. He erased the astonishment from his features, and donned a mild and courteous smile. Mr. Lamb sat blushing for the perfidy which the gem represented.

"May I be permitted?" asked M. Vence, and Mr. Lamb gladly passed the box to his host, who examined the iridescent bubble with casual interest.

"Yes, monsieur," he commented. "It is a nice trifle, quite beautiful. And what would you say is the value of it?" He raised his dark eyebrows.

"I really don't know," Mr. Lamb explained. "I really don't! Such things are outside my sphere."

"And mine, too," said M. Vence regretfully. He closed the box and handed it back. "It is, however — how do you say?—a pretty bauble!"

"That's what I think. But I feel rather as if I'd stolen it." He tried to speak lightly, but his expression told of a conscience much more troubled than the words admitted.

"But, no!" M. Vence expostulated, and, when it could be done without rudeness, turned the talk to other matters which did not distress his friend, forgetting all about the pearl. He was a merrier companion than ever.

IF there was a decoration for those who responded to the passport plea, M. Vence that night would have earned its highest class. The proceedings were expensive, but he spent his money gladly and without question, nothing that Mr. Lamb could say serving to stay him.

Nor was that all. When they said good-night on the steps of the hotel, the steps, though marble, moving a trifle unsteadily beneath them, M. Vence insisted that on the following evening before his departure Mr.

Lamb should be his guest at his villa.

"You have filled me with enjoyment," M. Vence announced with Gallic candor. "You must not depart upon your ways from Suracassar until you have allowed me the pleasure of presenting you to my niece. So few pass through such a place as this whom one can introduce to one's niece."

"Quite! Quite!" Mr. Lamb agreed, but somewhat vaguely. "I shall be charmed, most charmed!"

They stood there bowing to each other for a considerable time and then the happy evening was over.

The bungalow of M. Vence was cool, spacious and artistic, his servants cooked in the French rather than the Dutch-Malay fashion, and his liquor was good and plentiful. But all these things, pleasant factors though they were, dwindled into nothingness in his entertainment when set beside his niece. Her name was Jeanne. In her voice was music, in her eyes dreams, on her lips kisses. Her figure was like a young reed, her hair was jet, her arms were white and round. When she looked at Mr. Lamb in that way she had he grew quite imbecile. The dinner party, it will be understood, was a success from the first meeting and the first cocktail.

A more acute observer, however, might have found the beauteous Jeanne worthy of closer study, and, thereafter, more measured admiration.

Peter Lamb could not conceal that it was like an Arabian Night to him. In not attempting to do so he chose the better part because deception did not match his personality. And it was, he admitted the marvel and did his best to live up to it, succeeding as well as could have been expected of a little drab man who designed stained glass.

They sat on the broad veranda with liqueurs, and merriment was their boon companion. Beyond the wide garden full of flowery bushes breathing heavy perfume was the road along which poured the rainbow stream of Eastern life, ranging from wooden-wheeled bullock carts to Chinese gentlemen in pajamas, riding bicycles. There was a tinkle of bells and a hooting of motor horns. Moths drifted about.

A boy intruded upon them. M. Vence apologized and took the note which was presented to him.

As he read, his face clouded.

Ah, *sacre nom!*" he burst out. "This it is to be a man of business! I am called away for an hour. I must leave you. It is urgent. Ah, too bad! Pardon, pardon! I must leave you for a while with my little niece, Jeanne. She will entertain you. You must tell her of your travels. Pardon!"

IN a whirl of apologies M. Vence departed. Had he not been in such a hurry he would have seen that no apologies were necessary, since Mr. Lamb did not mind at all being left in the care of Jeanne and he was not good at concealing his emotions.

For a time they sat in silence, for Mr. Lamb seemed overwhelmed by his good fortune. He looked sideways, shyly, at his companion, and found her more beautiful than ever. The wine had brought a flush to her olive cheeks and had sent dreams nearer to the surface of her eyes.

Mr. Lamb sighed. He was not the kind of man upon whom Romance smiled, but his mood was unsober for various reasons.

Jeanne sighed also.

"It is hot in all the blazes of the lights, M'sieur Lamb," she breathed. "We can talk better in the cool darkness, yes."

She lisped on the words in a manner delicious to hear, and, what was

even more delightful, she rose, turned the electric switch, and allowed the night to wrap about them. The stars grew brighter. A moth blundered into Mr. Lamb's face, brushing it with soft wings. The small man's pulses were hurrying. He sighed again, but louder now. One can be bolder in the dark.

And then they talked. It was lazy, friendly talk, on a subdued note, because there was no need to speak loudly. To Mr. Lamb it was all beautiful and strange and glamorous, like a dream.

The warm, still night, melodious with the tinkle of the bells and scented by the breath of the garden, gave a quality of rapture to the simplest word. Mr. Lamb developed surprising eloquence.

Presently Jeanne sat up and lit a cigarette, her face a lovely medallion in the golden light with the night of all the world for a frame. She smiled at him, her head inclined toward him, her eyes seeking for his.

"My uncle has tell me of your pearl," she remembered suddenly in a little cry. "He said that you to me it would show. Show it—do!"

Mr. Lamb flicked finger and thumb in annoyance.

"Why, I only wish I could, my dear," he answered. "But I haven't it with me."

"Ah-h!" mourned Jeanne, and the sound was like a wave slipping back from the beach.

She leaned nearer, and put her hands on his, the cigarette's glowing tip swinging closer and signaling the position of her soft mouth.

"Ah-h!" she wept again.

Mr. Lamb, watching the cigarette, was awfully sorry. He did not know how to console her. She was like a lovely spoiled child denied a favor. She began to coax and wheedle, while Mr. Lamb could do no more than explain miserably that the gem was locked away on the ship.

"But I did want to see it so, Petáre," she cooed, and Mr. Lamb experienced a happy thrill at hearing his name upon her lips.

"Jeanne!" he said. Her face was close to his. He felt miserable over having to deny her such a boon.

"You shall see it, Jeanne!" he promised.

He was never quite sure whether he started the kiss or she did. These things are hard to decide when the night is dark. But it was a great adventure for a humdrum little man like Peter Lamb.

IN view of the length of time for which his business detained him, M. Vence could not be surprised that his guest had gone when he returned, but he was surprised at Jeanne, surprised and annoyed. Having heard her story, he addressed her rapidly and frankly in French, and his eyes and gestures were scornful.

"*Mon Dieu*, he told you he did not have the pearl!" he stormed.

"But, Louis," she urged, "I thought he lied. I had to kiss him that I might feel his pockets properly."

M. Vence swore roundly.

"Bah!" he said. "With your experience you should have more knowledge of human nature. When a man like that says a thing he means it. It is true!"

"One meets so few like that!" Jeanne commented.

But M. Vence's indignation was not to be turned by raillery. He was, it will be observed, a student of psychology, and the behavior of his pupil distressed him.

When the steward showed M. Vence to the cabin on the Dutch packet, Mr. Lamb was putting away some mementoes of his stay at Suracassar. It was an appropriate moment for the entry of the hospitable

soul who was so largely responsible for the cheerful tune which Mr. Mr. Lamb hummed as he packed. M. Vence was greeted with delight, and M. Vence was most amiable.

"My friend," he said at last, "I fear we had too much wine last night. My niece is young. She is not accustomed to such things. I fear she was a little—how do you say?—over the line. Naturally she told me of her behavior when I returned. I am to her both father and mother."

He looked keenly at Mr. Lamb, but he saw the face of innocence.

"I don't quite understand," said Mr. Lamb in a puzzled tone. "I noticed nothing."

THERE was a pause, while M. Vence studied the position. He was not quite sure how drunk Mr. Lamb had been, and recognized that the events of the evening might be a little blurred. He would have preferred Mr. Lamb to remember quite well, but since he did not, M. Vence tried another line first.

"I believe, monsieur," he said, "that she tried to persuade you to show her that little pearl you have."

"Why," smiled Mr. Lamb, "I am only sorry, sir, that I could not do so."

M. Vence frowned moodily.

"It is I who am sorry that ever I mentioned it," he admitted. "Girls, young girls, are such unreasonable things. If you please, now she has set her heart on the bauble. She says I must get it for her. She insists. They are so unreasonable, young girls!"

He paused, head on one side, more like a watchful raven than ever. Then M. Vence's eyes grew harder and colder.

"You will understand, monsieur, that I am not suggesting you should give me the pearl because my niece wants it and because I have shown you some hospitality!" He broke off and waited.

"Oh, no, no, no!" Mr. Lamb hastened to assure him.

M. Vence's teeth met in a little snap, and his complexion lost some of its olive tone.

"No," he reiterated, "but I am the slave of my niece. She has set her heart on the trinket. Good! If I can buy it she shall have it. I know not its value, as I have already told you. It is of no interest to me. But I am, however, passably well off. I have brought with me gulden notes to a value of $1,000 in your money. I may be paying you too much or too little. I cannot say. You like my niece; that is easily comprehended. It is for her. Come, monsieur, you are English and therefore the sport. Shall we say it is the go?"

Having brought the matter to a head, he was all smiles and *bonhomie*. He waved the fat roll of notes as if they were nothing, and congratulated himself on not pursuing the other course which called for more time than was available.

Mr. Lamb, however, did not respond as might have been expected. He grew reserved, and in his eyes there was a gleam of avarice, a certain look of meanness not unnatural to a small man who had saved hard and was now spending hard.

"I don't know that I want to sell it," he answered, and, though he tried to speak carelessly, M. Vence knew that this member of a race of shopkeepers was haggling with him.

"I do not wish to bargain," he said with dignity. "If it were for myself I should not press you. We say no more of last night. But you will understand that I wish this pearl as a present for my little Jeanne. Last night, monsieur, you thought more of my niece than you do this morning!"

He gave Mr. Lamb an ironical bow. Mr. Lamb was at a loss.

"Last night I fear I took too much of your very excellent brandy," he confessed.

M. Vance meditated, then drew out more notes.

"See," he said grandly, "here is the equal of another fifty, monsieur. Does not that satisfy you—for my niece?"

"But how do I know the price is fair to you?" Lamb demanded.

"We do not know that it is fair. But this boat it sails in fifteen minutes. We take a risk for the sake of my dear niece, Jeanne. It is the bet for us both."

"It is not enough," said Mr. Lamb, the corners of his weak mouth trembling lest he should over-reach himself.

M. Vence could no longer conceal his anger at one so unchivalrous.

"Good!" came the sharp ultimatum. "My niece insists on having that pearl. I"—the expressive shoulders shrugged—"it is my sorrow to be insistent with a friend, but I must have it and shall have it!"

He advanced threateningly. The moment had come when the lamb was to feel the raven's beak. Despite panic, Mr. Lamb would not admit defeat.

"Don't move," he said, his voice breaking so that there was little command in the words. "If I press this button, the steward will be here immediately!"

M. Vence was too wise to doubt this, but he smiled nevertheless.

"I must have that pearl for my niece," he snapped. "Unless you meet me, it shall be my regretful duty to report you to the captain as in possession of a stolen pearl. It is theft, nothing else, and you know it, monsieur. I should never have mentioned it, but you compel me to. Pearl-thieving is a serious matter. I offer you a fair price. I am afraid you must accept it!"

Mr. Lamb collapsed before this attack. The little spirit he had had deserted him. Dejection and shame swept up in him.

"But if it is stolen——"

"Girls do not understand," M. Vence interrupted. "It will be innocent for her to have it. See, I count the money onto the bunk."

He did so with an air. Mr. Lamb, realizing that the game was up, watched greedily.

"I suppose, after all, it's fair enough, and your niece is a charming girl," he said, seeking to save his face.

He took the matchbox from the top of a slipper, and handed it to M. Vence, who examined the pearl with bland unconcern. Thereafter Mr. Lamb accompanied his friend to the very foot of the companion-ladder, where they parted with felicitations, compliments and hopes for a future meeting on their lips, and scorn and hatred in their hearts.

Ten minutes later the ship was under way. Mr. Lamb, however, was not on deck to wave farewell to Suracassar where he had sojourned a while so pleasantly. He was in his cabin, writing carefully in a peculiar kind of cipher in a small, neat book. It was his ledger. On the debit side there was an entry for the purchase of one cultured pearl at 15——

"Charming people the French, particularly the young ladies!" murmured Mr. Lamb in his pedantic way as he blotted the credit entry meticulously, "even when they are criminals and rogues!" he added with a grave and kindly smile.

The second story of this series—FRUITS OF INNOCENCE—will appear in our next issue, out March 1

Seeds of Vengeance

By ROBERT W. SNEDDON

THE dismal blast of the steamship siren brought the spirit of George Foster scurrying back from the realms of dreams in which it had been traveling. Opening his eyes, he looked up dazedly at the white ceiling of the stateroom, then felt for the watch under his pillow.

"Four o'clock!" he mused as he looked at the radium-coated dial and hands. "He must be somewhere near the canal. Fog! That means we may be late getting into Boston."

The tremor of the steamship's frames had ceased, and silence, the muffling silence of heavy fog, was wrapped about the almost motionless boat. For a little while Foster lay awake, while overhead the regular blasts of the siren heralded a warning to other water-borne traffic that the pride of the line was nosing her way toward the avenue of buoys.

"Thank the Lord!" Foster breathed as the air grew heavier. "Tonight, if what Benson says is true, I'll be asking for an extra blanket. It's always cool in Maine."

It had been a providential inspiration, Benson's offer. He had known Benson casually for three or four years, but never had much to do with him, for he was a morose sort of cuss who made a fair living as an illustrator. Sold an occasional painting, too, pinetrees, water, sunsets. Foster had been casting about in his mind where to go for a holiday long due to him. He had run into Benson in the reception-room of a magazine office. Benson had been sitting there, his big boned frame hunched up in a cushioned wicker settee, his iron-gray hair all tousled as usual, and a grim set expression on his sallow, ugly face. He had nodded in a surly fashion to Foster and made room for him on the settee.

"Gosh! It's blazing hot. This sanguinary town gets my goat." He put his hand up to his throat and tugged at his collar. "Can't breathe in this big gasoline tank. I'll be glad to get where I can't smell a tin-can bus."

The impatient vehemence of the man and a certain savagery in his bloodshot eyes had prompted Foster to pacific small talk. He asked Benson if he was going away.

"Going away? Sure I am. Beating it out of town tonight. What about you? Got any plans for the summer?"

Foster had mentioned Provincetown as a possibility.

"Oh, my heavens! Holy codfish and mackerel! All the bum artists, Greenwich Village scavengers and flappers! Why don't you go to a he-man's place? Ever try Maine? That's something like life and beauty. Beauty! By God, it spills—over there. Say, listen, if you think you can get along with me, I'll make you a proposition. Save you money, and give you a helluva good time."

Benson's proposition, boiled down, was this: He had a house on an island in Sebago Lake, a sheet of water in Maine, fifty-eight miles around.

If Foster cared to come and share expenses, paying him a nominal sum for rent, he'd be glad to have him. Island was a Paradise in miniature, but damned lonely at times.

"You let me alone, Foster, and I'll do the same for you. That's all I ask," Benson had concluded.

The idea of an island had somehow vanquished Foster's better judgment —an island with rocks and pines, set in a lake, swimming, fishing, rowing, a log fire on wet days. After all, surely, he could overlook Benson's usual offensive manner. It was not intentional.

He had accepted Benson's offer and now he was on his way. He had written to him to meet him at Sebago Lake station in his motor-boat. Benson had gone ahead a couple of weeks earlier.

He lay in his bunk, now half-misgiving the summer. He wondered if he hadn't made a mistake in giving up Provincetown, which he knew and liked. What did he know of Benson, anyway?

All at once he made up his mind. He would try and be civil to the man, unless he got positively outrageous in his domineering. He thought he could handle his cranky moods tactfully.

As Foster feared, the plans for his train connections fell down sadly. The morning train to Portland had gone when he reached Boston, and when he arrived in Portland, he just barely caught the last train to Sebago Lake.

Arrived there, he hastened to the dock after a search of the station. There was no sign of Benson. He must be at the dock, morosely cursing his tardy guest. Neither was he at the dock, however, and Foster peered disconsolately about him. A man who was tinkering in a motor-boat looked up at him several times before he spoke.

"Looking for anyone?"

"Why, yes. I expected a friend to meet me here, but I missed my connections."

"One of the summer folks?"

"Yes, Benson. He has an island in the lake. Big fellow about your size. He said he came here sometimes. Benson."

IT SEEMED to Foster that at the mention of the name the man almost perceptibly stiffened the back he was bending over the engine. He did not answer for a minute.

"What does he do for a living? Make pictures? Is that the fellow?"

"Yes. I guess you know him."

"Yeah!"

The affirmative in the soft drawl of Maine, almost like that of the South, acquired a curious significance as the man uttered it.

"Friend of yours?"

Foster felt in an uncomfortable way that the man's steady scrutiny indicated his expectancy of an answer upon which much depended.

"I knew him in New York, not very well—an acquaintance. I'm going to stay with him. I wonder if I could hire a boat this time of night, or is it too late for that."

The man hesitated, wiping his hands thoughtfully on an oily rag.

"Well, all right. I can take you. Cost you eight dollars," he said finally. "Give me your grips. Best put on that raincoat. We'll maybe get wet. Got to go to the other end of the lake, close on fifteen miles."

Foster found his ferryman unusually taciturn. He apparently did not care to talk, or perhaps it was that the engine had to be nursed along, for he hung over it, tightening screws and turning taps at intervals. There was a heavy swell running, and between the smash of the boat on the waves and the thumping of the engine, some of Foster's few questions might well have been lost. The man

knew his job, however, for, after what seemed an interminable time, he nodded his head forward.

"There!" he shouted. "Right in front of you. He's got a lamp burning."

A dark tree-clad mass showed dimly ahead, and skirting it, the boatman cut off his engine and allowed the boat to drift to a rocky shelf. Foster thrust a handful of bills into his guide's hand and gingerly landed. He reached out and caught his two grips."

"Got them? All right. I've got to get back. Guess you'll find them all right.

"Thanks!" Foster shouted as the boat moved away.

The man turned his head sharply.

"Heah!"

"Yes."

"You're strange to me, and I'm strange to you, but don't take no offence. Maybe you're a friend of his, but keep your eyes open, friend. There's been talk about this fellow. Come pretty near going to jail, the dirty m——"

"What's that?"

The man shouted something which was lost in the splutter of his engine, and as he passed out of sight Foster took a firmer hold of his baggage went up the rock through the trees to the house, calling Benson's name.

There was no answer, however, and after a momentary hesitation Foster pushed open a door and entered what was a kitchen. There was a light in the room beyond, and Foster, puzzled, laid down his grips and went on. He found himself in a large room, one side of which was occupied by a wide stone fireplace with wooden benches on either side, while facing it was a row of windows giving onto a veranda. On a table burned an oil lamp, and as Foster stood, uncertainly, it spluttered and, with a faint sucking noise, went out.

Foster's irritation came to a head.

"Benson! It's Foster! Get a light, man, before I break my shins in the dark. Where are you?

THE same heavy silence as of a death-chamber met his call and its repetition. A thin current of air stirred the wood ashes on the hearth, as though fluttering, ghostly hands sought among them for some unconsumed fragment of a treasured letter.

Irritation succeeded bewilderment, and then as seconds passed in the darkness without sound of a living thing, there came to Foster an unusual feeling of oppression. He felt that a mesh of intangible coils was being drawn about him, constricting his chest, binding the freedom of his limbs. He stood still, breathing heavily, listening, gradually giving shape in the darkness to the various objects of furniture around him.

All at once it came to him that in this apparent solitude he was not alone, and that in some other part of the house, in the room beyond or perhaps upstairs, there was a tenant, an aspect which he dreaded to face. In that moment of answer to the problem which for so many seconds had been savagely attacking his reasoning faculties, he was vividly conscious of overmastering fear.

"Benson!" he cried again, and almost quailed as his voice tailed away into nothingness.

For a moment he was tempted to stumble out of the house of silence, anywhere out of reach of this terror which clawed at his heart-strings, and then as suddenly as it had come his terror went. Of course, he had matches in his pocket. He struck a light. The feeble flame of the paper match showed a room beyond, and with a determined step he went forward. There was fresh air blowing through the room; apparently the window was wide open, and its cool

breath upon his brow swept away the cobwebs, tenuous threads of terror.

Still holding the match, now extinguished, he stumbled and fell heavily on his knees over an obstacle. The hand he put out to save himself fell upon a yielding something. As though burned, he drew back his hand, then, regaining his balance, grimly set his teeth and struck another match.

Under the momentary illumination, Benson's face stared whitely up at him, with glaring eyes and gaping mouth. A long-legged insect with a pea-sized red body scuttled rapidly over it, and then the darkness was once more over all, even more impenetrable.

With a shudder Foster recoiled to his feet and blindly groped his way to the living-room. Was Benson dead or in some sort of a coma? Where the devil did he keep his oil, or lamps, a candle, a flashlight?

Wasting his precious matches, Foster hastily searched the shelves of the kitchen, finally discovering a candle. With this, he nerved himself to return to the room of death.

He had to admit with a sinking feeling that Benson was dead. As he bent over the body in its loose khaki pants and white undershirt, he could not help but note the strangeness of its appearance. The hands were raised to the throat as though to offer resistance to something attacking that part, and still stranger was the fact that about the throat was a bruise as though a cord had been twisted about it. There was no sign of any cord lying near the body nor in the room.

Foster stared at the dead man, in horrid conjecture, while moments passed. There was nothing could be done till daylight. That was plain. To embark on the lake, whose waters were to him as though they had never been chartered, was to court a fate which, though not so ghastly as Benson's, might well be equally final.

Taking his candle, he returned to the living-room and, sitting down, lit his pipe. How long had Benson been dead? He inspected the oil lamp and noted its large reservoir. It was quite possible the lamp could have been burning all day from the previous night. Death might well have come to Benson then, but how, and from what quarter?

The dead man's face had none of that tranquillity which comes with death, accompanied often with a semblance of beauty as though spirit had replaced flesh. On the contrary, the anguish of sudden and painful death had stamped it with a hideous imprint. Benson's end had been violent. Death by violence?

Slowly the realization of what this verdict might import to him came home to Foster. Another six or seven hours must pass before he could even set out for help. Had medical examination of the body been possible then, Foster's complete innocence was unquestionable, but with the delay, what then?

Foster felt surprised. He could find no pity in his heart for the man lying in the next room. He rather found his imagination turning to the fancy that he was the victim of some horrible plot. Benson meditating suicide, foreseeing the damning significance of his death upon his sole companion on this desolate island. But what grudge had he toward him to commit such an act? None that he could think of. What had the boatman said? If only he had caught the phrase, some illumination of the darkness in which he was groping might be possible.

FOSTER longed for daylight. Sleep was out of the question. Only he must get out of this house, now so sinister with brooding suspicion, with

lurking fears and the presence of death. Not that death in itself was terrible, but this aspect of it, this implication so menacing to himself. He could not bear to dwell upon it any longer.

He set the candle on the table in the kitchen among the unwashed dishes and blew it out, then left the house, and no sooner was his foot upon the soil, as upon the soil of reality, than he felt an instant release. The night was dark about him, but the sky seemed strangely near, with no moon nor stars visible.

The water lapped the shores of this rock-bound prison with an endless washing. He stood accustoming his eyes to the blackness, gradually making out the shapes of yellow pine trees, of low bushes, of a small building which he went over to examine.

It was an icehouse, its contents covered with sawdust, and he had a grim and nauseating thought, that should by any chance days elapse before he could get aid, he might make use of the ice for a preservative purpose for which it was never intended.

Standing by the water's edge, he felt disturbed by the resemblance of the trees about the house to something he had seen elsewhere. Then he realized with relief that the silhouetted trees, bowed, twisted and distorted, were such as Rackman pictures in his scenes of elfland, woods where each tree stretches out a claw-like hand to seize upon the unwary traveler.

He returned and strolled round to the front of the house, where, seeing a hammock slung between the side and a convenient tree, he paused, and with a grimace of weariness climbed in and stretched out. He had been positive that sleep was not for him that night, but, lulled by wind and wave, he dozed off.

He awakened abruptly, choking for breath. His hands instinctively went up to his throat. As they did so, they brushed off a pliant something which, swaying against the shingling of the house, had fallen across his throat, a tall stalk of some plant or thin tree sapling.

With an exclamation of annoyance, Foster threw his legs out and sat up. For the first time he noticed he had been lying in front of an open window. With a mutter of disgust he sprang to his feet. Ough! The window of the room!

Until dawn he sat away from the house, his back against a tree waiting. Not for anything would he have gone within the house from which at intervals came a stealthy rustling, as though rats dragged a rope end across the pine flooring.

Morning came, and Foster hastened to investigate the island. It was small, a mere rocky islet, not more than an acre in extent. At a rude dock he found the motor-boat and, what was of more use to him, a rowboat, the oars to which he found under a bush. Daylight now disclosed other islands and toward the north the shore line.

Putting aside his craving for a cup of coffee, Foster untied the rowboat and made for the nearest island. As he came close after a fairly stiff row he shouted lustily. There was no response, and, landing, he was amazed to find an empty two-story camp. Its windows were gone, its door wide open with a scribble of "Thanks for hospitality—To fishermen."

A rusty coffee pot stood on the stove, the bedsprings still stood upon their wooden legs. There were ashes on the hearth, but no sign of occupants.

Two other islands were as mysteriously vacated. In the substantial camp of one of them, everything for comfort was there, bedding on beds, lamps filled, canned food in the cupboard, flour and sugar in the bins,

firewood cut, and dishes set upon the table as though for a meal. To Foster's amazed eyes, it looked as though an imperative summons had come to the occupants to get out on the moment before the island was submerged by a volcanic upheaval.

"This beats the old Marie Celeste mystery. Only, instead of a ship found deserted with food on the table and the galley fire burning, here's a house. What is there about this place that makes people clear out so suddenly as if stricken with terror—clear out for good, evidently!"

He picked up a newspaper, "1921! Good Lord! I must get along."

Leaving the islands behind, he pulled steadily for the shore, turning now and again to scan its impenetrable growth of trees. It seemed deserted. Not a thread of smoke rose from the pine trees.

"Twenty-five miles from a city and yet it's a wilderness," he muttered, bewildered. "Surely there must be people living here."

As if in answer to his question, a staccato popping broke the silence.

"Someone with a kicker. Thank God!"

AS THE approaching boat came nearer, coming out from a little cove, Foster distinguished an elderly man at the stern. He shouted, then rowed as rapidly as he could toward the oncomer.

"Hi—there! Hello!"

The elderly man sat up and, cupping his hand to his ear, shouted:

"How? What you say?"

"Where's the nearest house?"

"Joe Walsh's. This is his kicker. Borrowed it to go a-fishing. Anything wrong, friend?"

Foster poured out his story as briefly as he could.

"That do beat creation, yeah!" commented his confidant. "Yes, sir, it do. Let me see," he sighed, then briskly wound up the reels of the two rods projecting over his stern. "Guess I don't go a-fishing this morning. Heah, give me that rope and I'll tow you."

He hitched the rope and bent over his engine. "Darn this engine, it'll kill me yet. Threw me out day before yesterday. Git—up—ye—back-kicking ol' mule."

The kicker spat, then began to pop. "Theah she goes, glory be!" shouted the skipper. "We'll go see the sheriff—cousin of mine—Wilbur Gammon. We'll land in Kettle Cove."

Half an hour later Foster, guided by his new found friend, had landed, and after traversing three-quarters of a mile of woods came out upon the Roosevelt Highway, Portland, Maine, to Portland, Oregon. The sheriff was at home, a quiet and courteous man, who listened without comment to the story.

"I'll go with you, Mr. Foster," he said simply. "I'll go in and telephone. Wait here with Mr. Watkins."

Foster heard the jingle of the party telephone, then the muffled voice of the sheriff before he came out again.

The three men took the path down to the lake.

"What was the name of the fellow staying on the island where that man got drowned last year? Watkins over to South Casco sold the island to the man that was drowned. The pair of them used to come up. Seems to me he was called Benson, Leslie."

"By golly! I remember, Wilbur. Yeah. Benson was the name. Made a big stir here. Benson comes over one day all het up. Seems his friend went swimming and never come up again. Never did find his remains. No! If you goes down here, you stay down to feed the eels. Yeah! That's the man, and now he's dead himself. Folks made quite a talk, some thinking they was more in it than showed,

but this Benson, he made a good case, and they set it down as death by accident."

"What sort of man was it that was drowned?" asked Foster.

"I saw him to the store sometimes, mighty pleasant spoken and well-traveled man. Been to South America, hunting plants and bugs and the like. A naturalist, I guess you'd call him. But being a friend of Benson, you know about him."

"No, I never heard about this," Foster confessed.

Confronted with the body, the sheriff shook his head.

"He's dead, sure enough," he said. He looked at Foster frankly. "I don't like the looks of this, Mr. Foster."

"'Pears like he didn't die easy, Wilbur," commented his cousin eagerly. "That there red line round his throat ain't nice. Might have been a rope. Might have hanged himself—suicide, yeah! Gosh! It do make a man feel pretty slim seeing a remains like this."

"He was lying exactly as you see him when I found him," said Foster quickly.

"I'm not doubting your word, Mr. Foster," said the sheriff, knitting his heavy brows. He sat down heavily on the edge of the bed. "You found this window open?" he asked after a pause.

"Yes, the house was open. I walked in the door by which we came in about ten last night."

"Let me see your watch. You've got daylight-saving time. Ten—that's nine, by our time. And the lamp was burning?"

"Yes. Just went out as I entered."

"I guess that fellow had some enemies, yeah!" remarked Mr. Watkins as he bit upon a plug of tobacco. "Maybe one of them got him?" He cocked an inquiring eye at Foster.

"I don't know anything about his private life or business," said Foster hastily. "I hope, Mr. Gammon, you don't think I had anything to do with this."

The sheriff shook his head.

"No!" he said slowly. "Only you being here——"

"Of course," said Foster ruefully, "I see! Well, I'm in your hands, Mr. Gammon."

"By Godfrey!" cried Mr. Watkins as a spatter or rain beat on the roof. "Looks like we was here to stay. Just look at them waves. They won't be no one here for some time, Wilbur. When it blows up, the whole lake is like to turn over, yeah! A nasty piece of water."

A torrent of rain was dashing down upon the island. A heavy mist rose from the surrounding waters.

"A pot of coffee would suit me," said Mr. Watkins briskly. "Say, have you had your breakfast yet?"

"No," Foster confessed. "I didn't think of it, but now— Yes, I'm ready for something to eat."

Mr. Watkins vanished into the kitchen, where he could be heard clattering stove-lids. Soon a pleasant aroma of coffee and sizzling bacon bore witness to his activities, and in a few minutes he reentered triumphantly.

"Heah, young fellow, put that into you. There's a pile of comfort in bacon and coffee on a cold morning. Set in your chair, Wilbur."

FOSTER consumed his breakfast ravenously, ably assisted by Mr. Watkins. The sheriff contented himself with a cup of coffee.

"I'm going to search his pockets," said the sheriff when he was through. He rose to his feet and went into the bedroom.

Almost simultaneously there came from him a startled exclamation which brought the other two men to their feet. They stared at each other. Mr. Watkins nodded his head

toward the room, and, moved by a common impulse, they hurried to it.

The sheriff was standing just inside the door, and as Foster reached him, he put out his hand and caught his arm in a grip, the force of which he apparently did not realize.

"Look!" he said hoarsely. "What's that?"

Foster looked at the body for an instant before he realized that above it bent a slender, flexible vine which had apparently blown in across the window sill. It was swaying to and fro, descending to the body, like a long sunflower-stalk beaten down by wind and rain. And as Foster watched, with a shrinking for which he could find no reason, the pliant vine touched the body.

At the contact it seemed to quiver, then, as though alive, it began with a stealthy gliding motion to slowly feel its way upward toward the head of the body. Foster tried to speak, but the words froze upon his lips. He heard Mr. Watkins give a choking gasp, and felt him put out a shaky hand to the door-jamb.

Minutes seemed to pass as they watched the reptilian progress of this incredible product of the plant world. Now, as though actuated by some nervous yet determined mental process, almost human, it touched the throat, and in that moment its slender, quivering tip curled convulsively and whipped about the livid throat of what had been Benson.

At that culminating moment of horror Foster's paralysis vanished and, springing forward, he grasped the pliant stalk, and with a spasm of disgust, tore it away from the body. It slithered to the floor, and then, as though conscious that it had been balked of further mischief to its victim, slowly wavered upward to the open window, blindly seeking escape.

"By Godfrey, let me out of here!" groaned Mr. Watkins. "That's something out of hell."

"You saw that, Mr. Gammon," said Foster, controlling the shuddering which had come upon him. "God! I never saw anything so beastly."

The sheriff moved away with heavy limbs. Once outside the house, he took off his hat and mopped his brow, standing bareheaded in the heavy rain. Under the clean rain, sanity returned to all, but they stood looking at each other uncertainly as though afraid to voice their thoughts.

"I saw a spade and an axe in the kitchen, Leslie," the sheriff said at last. "I'll go get them."

Armed with the implements, the three men went hastily to the front of the house. With a swinging stroke the sheriff severed the tough stalk, the tip of which was now creeping upward against the shingles. The tip fell to earth with a singularly lifelike wriggle.

"Looks like a snake, yeah!" said Mr. Watkins, drawing back.

The sheriff made no comment, but, taking the spade, began to dig in the dark soil, laying bare the slender root about the thickness of a finger which lay beneath it. The rain in a running stream soaked him, but he continued doggedly as though engaged in a sacred duty. Suddenly he stopped, and with a mighty heave ripped up a long length.

"I guess its root is here," he muttered as he tugged in vain. He put his foot once more to the blade of the spade. The earth rose in a growing pile. The two others came closer in curious surmise.

ALL at once the sheriff withdrew the spade with a startled expression. He bent down, then thrust the spade once more into the soil, but gently. A mass of earth fell away into the shallow trench he had already made.

"God A'mighty!" cried Mr. Watkins tremulously. "A remains! I never knew no one to be buried here."

The sheriff continued his unpleasant task grimly, while the others stood by in silence. He paused and held up a shred of cloth adhering to the spade. Mr. Watkins gazed at it, as if uncertain what he was called upon to do, then smote his hands together.

"Land's sakes! I seen that cloth before. Yeah! The fellow that was drowned had a suit of it. I seen him to the store many a time in it, and I asked him once where I could get a piece like it. Yeah!"

"He wasn't drowned no more than you were, Wilbur," said the sheriff. "That's him sure enough. I guess Benson could tell us how he came to be here. They bought the island together, so they say, and I guess——"

"Benson wanted it to himself," Foster heard himself say as though from a great distance.

"Exactly. It don't need much brains to see that. Benson murdered him and buried him in a pocket in the rock. He was safe till judgment day, for there's none of us come here, and I guess Benson took no count of that coming to himself so soon."

The three men gazed down at that which was now uncovered, staring at a most horrible phenomenon.

Mr. Watkins sat down abruptly on a rock.

"But, God A'mighty," he remarked almost to himself, "this kind of plant, or whatever it be, with its roots in the poor fellow's remains, drawing life out of it, and revenge-like creeping on and on till it got him, him that's lying dead inside. God save us! It's fearsome to think on, yeah! My stomach ain't so young as 'twas."

Foster found his voice.

"You said he—this man was a plant collector in South America, didn't you?"

"Yeah! Yes, sir, I did. You think mebbe he had this on him when he was killed, a kind of seed or something that growed into this creeping and crawling thing?"

"The seed of vengeance," muttered Foster almost unconsciously.

The sheriff threw the spade down.

"There'll be no trouble for you, Mr. Foster. What we've seen we'll keep to ourselves. Such things don't happen ordinarily, but God works in mysterious ways."

"Yeah! He sure do!" Mr. Watkins agreed. "Yeah, Wilbur."

"So we'll see to it, Mr. Foster," said the sheriff, laying a comforting hand on Foster's shoulder, "that they bring in a verdict of 'Visitation of God,' and God'll take care of us all in the case, our hands being clean."

The Most Mysterious Happening in Our Lives

AS RELATED BY

MARY AND FLORENCE NASH

(Co-stars in "A Lady's Virtue")

to

BIDE DUDLEY

[*This is the second of a series of genuine mystery stories, from the lives of famous people of the stage and screen.*]

MYSTERY has not figured extensively in the lives of Mary and Florence Nash, sisters and co-stars of Rachel Crothers' latest play, "A Lady's Virtue."

They are practical girls whose thoughts dwell principally on the everyday, matter-of-fact affairs life has to offer. As Mary Nash put it aptly recently:

"Florence and I love our work. We were brought up in the theatre and are so deeply interested in it we haven't time, even if we had the inclination, to delve into the so-called unreal—the mysterious — phases of existence on this mundane sphere. We do not seek problems emanating from the mystic world. We leave them to people who like puzzles. Even as children, ghost stories held no fascination for us. They seemed silly; hence they bored us. We are, we believe, possessed of good, hard common sense and we look at everything from the common sense angle."

Nevertheless, the Nash sisters have not escaped mystery entirely. There is one unexplained "something" in their lives and they spend much time discussing it, in the hope of finding a solution for it. It involves a murder that occurred about ten years ago here in New York. A man was killed in an automobile. They understood he was a gangster called "Shorty," or some such a nickname; but they are not certain that his real name was ever made public. It was Florence Nash who was confronted with the mystery "proper," if that form of speech may be used.

Mary Nash, however, corroborates her sister's story in every detail and both are eager even now to have any solution of the mystery readers of this magazine may wish to offer them.

In the ten years that have passed, they have never lost interest in the incident. Indeed, so vivid is Florence Nash's memory of the terror she went through when it occurred, that the thought of it causes her to pale perceptibly today. It cannot be said that they are completely without a theory as to the reason for

the mystery. They have one—just one—to which I will refer later.

I called on the sisters in their double dressing-room behind the scenes at the Bijou Theatre, where they were appearing recently, and, as they "made up" preparatory to playing a matinee performance of "A Lady's Virtue," we discussed their mystery.

"As practical young persons," said Mary Nash, "Florence and I never have believed in anything we couldn't see. Neither of us is 'psychic,' as people supposed to possess unnatural powers are called. To us everything must be natural to gain our credence. I, for instance, have attended seances held by women known as mediums, merely out of curiosity, and have been told I was an 'adverse influence' or an 'unreceptive personality.'

"I have been asked to leave such meetings on these grounds, the mediums explaining I made their powers ineffective through my mere presence. It all sounded like the veriest foolishness to me and, on two or three occasions, I have taken time, in leaving, to say as much. That's how far away from 'isms' I am, and the same is true of Florence.

"Be that as it may, we are both inclined to believe there is something in the theory of thought transmission. Frequently I will say something to Florence at the very moment she is about to mention the same subject to me. Such instances, of course, are not unusual.

"With the advent of the radio and its marvelous development, one can readily believe in thought waves. They could not be more mysterious than the air waves that carry voices, music and what-not. And that may be a foundation for a plausible explanation of our mystery. Now for the story!

"We were living at the Seminole Hotel, Sixty-ninth Street and Broadway. Florence and I had adjoining rooms and the door was always open between. It was a warm summer's night and we had the windows up. I went to sleep, as nearly as I can reckon, about eleven o'clock. Florence had retired half an hour earlier. She was tired that night, having spent the entire day rehearsing. I spoke to her ten minutes after she tumbled into bed and received no answer, so I knew she was asleep.

"Some time during the early morning I was awakened with a start by a scream from Florence. I leaped out of bed and rushed into her room.

" 'Florence, dear!' I called. 'What's the matter?'

"She was sitting bolt upright in bed. On her face was a look of abject terror. She was wide awake. For what seemed to me an age, she swallowed and groaned, then babbled in her effort to speak. Finally, she quelled her fear a bit.

" 'They killed him,' she replied hysterically. 'They killed him. Oh, how terrible!'

" 'Killed whom?'

" 'A man! He was in an automobile with three other men. Two of them killed him. Honestly, Mary, they killed him.'

"I thought she had been dreaming.

" 'There, now, dear!' I said soothingly, as I sat on the bed and put my arms about her. 'You've had a nightmare. Nobody has been killed. Try to calm yourself. Everything's all right. Don't be afraid. I'm here.'

" 'Nightmare? No!' she almost screamed. 'I haven't had a nightmare. They killed him. I haven't been asleep for an hour.'

"She collapsed and buried her face in the pillow, moaning, 'They killed him!' over and over.

"I WANTED to get her a glass of water, but at first she wouldn't let me go. She clung to me with a frenzied

grip. Gradually, however, under my soothing ministrations, she quieted and permitted me to go into the bathroom for water. It took me five minutes to persuade her to take a drink, but finally she did and, after a while, became almost normal. Then she told me a weird tale.

" 'I was awake, wide awake, thinking of some shopping I have to do,' she said. 'It was quiet both here and out on Broadway. I could even hear trains across the Hudson letting off steam. In the distance I heard the hum of an automobile heading uptown. The purr grew and diminished and I knew the car had passed the hotel. All was quiet again for about a minute. Then suddenly a picture of four men in that car came before my eyes just as plainly as though it had been thrown on a screen right here in my room. One man was driving; the other three were in the car's tonneau. The trio behind were in an argument. I don't know what it was about, but they were very angry and it was two against one.

" 'After a particularly violent exchange of words, accompanied by gestures, two of the men caught the third by the throat and choked him. He struggled, but they held him back against the rear of the seat. Then one drew a knife and stabbed him twice. Yes, sister, he stabbed him twice. I saw it—in the picture.'

"At this point she had to stop because the realty of the picture quite evidently was painfully vivid. Then she went on again:

" 'I saw him gasp three times, then sink down on the floor of the car, and one of the others told the man at the wheel to "step on it." The stabber next threw the knife out of the auto and I heard the metallic sound when it hit the curb. A moment later the two lifted the other to the seat and held him up, his head drooping forward. The stabber told the man in front to drive to a drug store. He did. It is at Eighth Avenue and 125th Street.

"There the car stopped at the curb and the murdered man was carried into the store and placed on the floor by the two who had attacked him. They told the druggist he was sick and asked him to summon a doctor. Then they ran out, leaped into the car and sped away. That's all, except that the druggist found the man was dead and called the police on the telephone.'

"It was now 4 a. m. The story, I was firmly convinced, was merely the result of a bad dream. I told Florence to forget it and go back to sleep. She vowed she could do neither, and until broad daylight we sat on the bed and talked. She continued to describe the murder, adding minute details she had overlooked in the first telling, and I continued my efforts to induce her to go to sleep. My urgings were absolutely fruitless.

"Finally, shortly after 7 o'clock, we both dressed and went to breakfast, which our maid brought us. The maid expressed surprise at seeing us up so early, but we offered her no explanation. You see, working actresses seldom arise before 10 o'clock, at the earliest.

"I feared Florence, who was still very nervous, was ill and kept her in my sight all the time.

"As we ate the maid brought us a morning newspaper. Florence snatched it and looked through its pages eagerly for news of her 'murder.' There was none.

" 'Now, dear,' I said, 'you must admit you were dreaming. If a murder had been committed, the paper would have the story of it.'

"She tossed the paper aside, thinking deeply. Suddenly she said:

" 'No! It happened just before 4 o'clock, and that's too late for the morning newspapers.'

"I induced her to finish her breakfast, at the same time doing my best to divert her mind into more placid channels. But she could not stop thinking of her 'murder.' I talked of new plays, old plays, actors, books and gowns. I even played the piano in my hope of getting her mind off the 'murder', but it was all to no avail. "When 9 o'clock came, Florence dispatched the maid to get the first edition of an evening paper. The maid returned in ten minutes with the paper. Florence grabbed it, glanced once at the front page and swooned. I placed her on a couch, assisted by the maid, and we revived her quickly.

" 'Read it!' she screamed.

"I looked at the paper. There, in two-column headlines, was:

"AUTOISTS MURDER COMPANION AND SPEED AWAY
"Body Left In Drug Store At Eighth Avenue And 125th Street.
"Victim Choked And Stabbed."

"The whole story, just as Florence had told it, was there except certain details of the killing that she said took place in the car. At the time the victim was unidentified. Now, what is the answer to our mystery?"

I admitted I could offer no hint of an explanation.

"I have an idea," concluded Mary Nash," that the human body is something like a radio receiving set and that the picture came to Florence 'on the air.' She was 'tuned in' physically at the time and there was nothing in the way to stop the waves and keep them from reaching her. It seems silly, doesn't it? But it's the only way we can even attempt to explain it."

Florence Nash, who had been listening all through her sister's narrative, spoke at this point.

"Mary has told the truth in every detail," she said. "However, it's only comparatively recently that we thought of the 'radio wave' theory. If I am a human radio set I hope and pray nobody will broadcast any more murders on my wave-length. That experience was too horrible. A repetition might drive me crazy."

"Curtain time!" called the stage manager. And I bowed myself out. I was thinking deeply, as I left, about the Nash mystery, and I've been thinking about it ever since.

[The third story of this series will be told by A. L. Erlanger, the Internationally famous producer. It will appear in our next issue, out March 1.]

The Wyvern of Bodelliam

By J. B. HARRIS-BURLAND

CHARLES BODELLIAM, smoking his after-dinner cigar in the Great Hall of Bodelliam Castle, regarded the heraldic splendor of that noble apartment with satisfaction—with more satisfaction indeed than he could regard his financial affairs in that particular year of grace.

Over the fireplace there was a carved shield, and this contained no less than thirty-six coats-of-arms, each of them representing a family that had given an heraldic heiress to the Bodelliams of Bodelliam.

Of course, this shield, carved in stone and emblazoned with the full glories of *gules* and *azure*, of *or* and *argent*, of *sable* and *ermine* and *vair*, was not in any way the work of Charles Bodelliam. It had been wrought in the seventeenth century when there had been a rage for such things, and quarterings had been dug up, as it were, out of the most unlikely ground—wrought so that it might add to the family pride of gentlemen who had little else to gratify their vanity.

Charles Bodelliam, indeed, had a grievance against the ancestor who had caused this very beautiful mantelpiece to be erected in the hall, for modern research had dealt harshly with nineteen of the thirty-six quarterings and had proved that the Bodelliam family had no right to them at all.

But Charles Bodelliam had made ample amends for the carelessness or, as some might have called it, the acquisitiveness of this dishonest collector. By his own efforts, aided by the skill of that noted genealogist, Dan Quickerell, he had traced his descent from no fewer than two hundred and fifty-three heiresses, and had proved his right to bear their arms. A fine show he had of them, each emblazoned on a separate shield of oak, and hung round the stone walls of the great hall, where they glowed and glittered like strings of gaily colored beads.

They were pleasant to look upon. And on this particular evening toward the end of November, when the sea fog lay over the moors, and a noble pile of logs blazed fiercely in the open fireplace, and there was a faint mist that hung round the timbered roof of the Great Hall, Charles Bodelliam, sitting in a very uncomfortable oak chair, was mightily pleased with the bright colors and the gilding of the two hundred and fifty-three shields. He was a tall, thin man, white-haired and clean shaven; an elderly man who had fought bravely against misfortune.

He had devoted his life to the management of his estates, heavily encumbered by mortgages when he had inherited them at the age of twenty-two. Only a man with brains and untiring energy could have escaped

utter defeat at an early stage of the battle. As it was, the issue was still hanging in the balance.

The hobby of Bodelliam's leisure hours was heraldry, his weakness an almost insane pride in his ancestry. Both hobby and weakness were in a fashion linked up with his work. The desire to save the Bodelliam estates and to live in the Castle where his "folk," as he called them, had lived for seven hundred years was a worthy desire. There was something fine about it. The "boast of heraldry" was just an amusement, and the insane pride of birth—like anything else carried to excess—was an evil. But it is not difficult to understand how the three were linked together in the case of Charles Bodelliam. They were plants that had sprung from the same soil.

The door in the carved oak screen at the far end of the hall opened and an old butler came forward. He was the only man-servant in the house, for Charles Bodelliam, in order to save money, lived very simple; more simply than many of his tenants, where food was concerned, and with less state than was to be found at the rectory. The butler was a tall and a fat man, quite bald. He looked prosperous, but he suffered from gout and rheumatism, and he walked very slowly, with the tread of an elephant.

"Hello, Jaines," said Bodelliam.

"It's Mr. Quickerell again, sir," the man replied gloomily.

Bodelliam sprang to his feet.

"By Jove, that's good news! Why haven't you shown him in here?"

"He's removing his outer garments, sir. He's very wet."

"Wet? But the fog hasn't turned to rain, has it, Jaines?"

"No, sir. Mr. Quickerell lost his way on the moor and stumbled into a bit of a stream—not deep, sir, but enough water to splash him considerably."

"Oh, I must find him some dry clothes, Jaines—you and I together, eh? Tell Mrs. Peters to get a room ready for him."

"Yes, sir."

"And I dare say he's hungry. Well, I'll come out and see for myself, Jaines. But we can rake up a cold supper, eh?"

"Of course, sir, and the cook would make some soup hot for him."

"Ah, soup, that's excellent. Where is Mr. Quickerell?"

"In the kitchen, sir. He did not come to the front door."

THE car had broken down, and Dan Quickerell had been obliged to walk for five miles. He had been down to Penzance on business, and had intended to look in for a few minutes on his way to Exeter. That was all Charles Bodelliam could get out of Quickerell until Quickerell had satisfied his hunger and thirst.

"I'll tell you later," said the old man, "and maybe you won't care to hear what I'm going to say, Mr. Bodelliam. I'm getting on in years, and it's a queer night to be out on the moor, falling into streams. Yes, I will have a bit of that fine cheese and a glass of port with it."

Charles Bodelliam laughed and asked no more questions. His guest was a queer fellow, and not to be hurried if anything was to be got out of him. Bodelliam knew Quickerell very well, but even a stranger would have known, just by looking at Quickerell, that he was something rather uncommon—a rare specimen of humanity not often to be found in the twentieth century.

His tall, lean body, his face the color of old parchment, his bald head, his hooked nose like the beak of a hawk, his small, twinkling black eyes and wide, thin-lipped mouth were

physical peculiarities that gave him the appearance of a gigantic bird of prey.

The fact that he had been obliged for the moment to put on clothes that were too short and too wide for him made him just a little ridiculous. But the most curious thing about Dan Quickerell did not arise from his physical appearance so much as from the medieval atmosphere that he seemed to bring with him. It was as though continual research, continual perusal of old documents had cut him off from all present-day affairs. One would never have thought of discussing the latest play or novel with Dan Quickerell. One would assume that Dan Quickerell had died at least a hundred years, and that though his memory was fresh in regard to matters that had happened before his death, he could not be expected to talk on any subject of a more recent date.

" 'TIS queer and lonely on the moors," said old Quickerell, seated before the blazing logs in the Great Hall and stretching out his great ugly feet to the warmth, "but I like them in the sunshine."

He took a small box of gold and enamel from his waistcoat pocket, and inhaled a pinch of snuff. When he had sneezed three times, he said:

"I shouldn't wonder if a man had to fight the devil in these parts."

Charles Bodelliam laughed.

"One has to fight," he replied, "against taxation, and the low price of corn, and the desire of every one to smash the owner of land, and—against the past."

"There was never a Bodelliam that could not fight, if he chose. You'll get the better of them all in the long run."

"I hope so, my old friend, but I'm not out of the wood yet by a long run."

"You are not in a wood, Mr. Bodelliam, to my way of thinking. You're on the moors, and the fog on them tonight is thicker than the leaves on a tree."

"What are you saying? What do you mean?"

"I am talking nonsense and there's no meaning to it. I like those shields of yours, and I'm proud to think that my little daughter, Rose, painted every one of them."

"Yes, she's an artist, that girl of yours, Quickerell. But what did you mean when you said——"

"We can add to them yet," Quickerell interrupted. "If you live long enough, we'll hang up five hundred of them. And then we can have them all marshaled on a single gold shield. And that reminds me of a rare joke. I told a man the other day that you had two hundred and fifty heiresses in your family, and he cried out: "Great Scott, but I'd like to have the wealth of that fellow!"

Charles Bodelliam chuckled.

"I explained to him," Quickerell continued, "that an 'heiress' in heraldry need have no more than the clothes she stands up in, that it only means that her father is dead and has left no sons, and that all you've got out of most of them is the right to quarter their arms with your own. He thought I was a bit mad."

"Very likely he was right," said Bodelliam. "We are a bit mad over this sort of thing—in the eyes of those who don't understand. But what did you mean when you said that the fog on the moors——?"

"Oh, you'd better forget the foolish talk of an old man, Mr. Bodelliam."

"But you are not an old man, though you do look very old, Quickerell. You are not more than sixty-five. And you do not talk nonsense. You said you'd tell me later, and that I wouldn't care to hear it."

Quickerell was grimly silent. So

tightly were his lips pressed together that his mouth was only a thin line. Charles Bodelliam frowned, rose from his chair and stood with his back to the fire. In this position he was face to face with Quickerell. He could also see the full length of the room.

Still waiting for Quickerell to speak, his eye traveled along the row of shields, down the left side of the hall, then along the screen at the end of it, and then back again to the point on the right where the line of shields came to an end.

"Hello!" he said, "the Polferro arms have gone."

Quickerell made no reply. He took a pinch of snuff from his beautiful golden box. Bodelliam walked away from the fire and stood under the place where the shield should have hung.

It had been the latest addition to his collection, and had been barely a fortnight in its place. The finding of these arms had been due to the patient research of old Quickerell, who had dug as deep as the fourteenth century before he had dragged them out into the light of day. Rose, his daughter, had excelled herself in the design and emblazonment of this particular coat. It had been a real work of art.

"What's the meaning of this?" queried Bodelliam, as though Quickerell were responsible for the removal of the shield—as though Quickerell himself had taken it down and hidden it. "Where is it?" Bodelliam continued, and looked on the floor.

A heavy oak chest lay close to the wall, and Bodelliam moved it. And there he found the shield of oak, cracked into three pieces; so badly cracked that it came apart in his hands.

"Look at this," he cried angrily. "It couldn't have fallen. The nail is still up there. I can see it. The head of the nail is so large that the ring cannot pass over it."

Quickerell sneezed three times, and then he said, "God bless you!" but spoke in a whisper, so that Bodelliam could scarcely hear the words. Bodelliam was justly irritated. He strode back to the fireplace and thrust the pieces in front of Quickerell's face.

"Do you see that?" he shouted. "Smashed to bits. Who's done it?"

Quickerell held out both his hands and, taking the fragments, put them together, and laid them on his knees.

"A nice bit of work," he said. "My little Rose never did anything better. *It's a pity. Or, a wyvern gules*—gold and blood, and a monster that we don't see nowadays. But look at that wyvern, Mr. Bodelliam. It almost makes your flesh creep, doesn't it? A wonderful girl, Rose. Well, it's a pity——"

And he flung the pieces of the broken shield on the fire. They fell in the heart of the flames, and fed the furnace with their old oak and new oil paint.

Charles Bodelliam cried out: "Damn it all, Quickerell, I—I——"

"Steady, Mr. Bodelliam," Quickerell interrupted sharply. "That's best burnt and forgotten. Now I'll tell you about the Polferros and what it means to a man to have Polferro blood in his veins."

CHARLES BODELLIAM sat by the closed window of his bedroom. The only light in the room came from the grate, a dull red glow, with every now and then a spurt of flame as a coal shifted its position and fell into the red heart of the fire.

As a rule Charles Bodelliam did not have a fire in his bedroom. He was economical, and regarded this as a luxury. But tonight he had put a match to the wood and paper. He felt very lonely, and Bodelliam Castle seemed very cold and dark. And all

around Bodelliam Castle the fog lay like a field of snow. Looking down on it from his room high in the tower, and with the moonlight on it, it was not unlike snow, save that it shifted and rolled and heaved like a white sea.

It was two hours since Charles Bodelliam had come up to bed—climbing up that long spiral staircase to the room that was raised above all the rooms in that ancient house. But he had found it impossible to sleep.

Most men would have slept soundly enough after listening to the story of Alice Polferro, the witch who had been burned at the stake and whose spirit had sailed away above the heads of the crowd in the form of a gigantic wyvern of smoke and flame.

Some men would have laughed at the story, and have jeered at the curse laid on all her descendants by no less a person than the Bishop of the Diocese. But Charles Bodelliam believed in that kind of thing, and Quickerell, who was nothing if he was not medieval, was the very worst person in the world to break news of this sort.

Quickerell had spoken of his discovery as though it were a real tragedy in Bodelliam's life. Arranging the papers in the muniment room of a well-known Cornish peer, Quickerell had come across the documents by chance. It was an account, written in Latin, of the trial and death of Alice Polferro, and a very early English ballad of sixteen verses on the "Polferro Worm"—a devouring monster supposed to be no less than the devilish form assumed by the unhappy witch.

Quickerell had begged the loan of the documents and had brought them with him to Bodelliam Castle. The car had broken down and he had been forced to walk. He had lost his way in the fog, and had very nearly walked over the edge of the cliffs into the sea. Then he had fallen into a brook.

And, after that, in the moonlit mist, Quickerell vowed that he had seen the form of some great beast stirring in the mist—something that was not unlike the mythical wyvern of heraldry. It had roared at him and he had fled, and had mercifully found the road again.

Such had been Dan Quickerell's story, and Bodelliam was not the sort of man to laugh at it. For one thing, so far as his own family was concerned, the curse had come true. His great-grandmother had married a Miss Trevethan, an only child, and this Miss Trevethan was the direct descendant of Alice Polferro. It was not until this marriage that the Bodelliam fortunes had begun to decline.

Charles Bodelliam's grandfather had gambled away a hundred thousand pounds and had committed suicide. Charles Bodelliam's father, trying to retrieve the family fortune, had speculated, and piled mortgage on mortgage to pay his debts. He had died in his bed, but his health had been broken by adversity. Charles Bodelliam himself had fought a long and cruel fight, and he was fifty years of age and victory was not yet within his grasp.

And, sitting at the window, he firmly believed that clever old Dan Quickerell had discovered the root of the malady. On the whole, he was rather glad that Quickerell had made the discovery. He had never quite understood why everything had gone against him all his life in this effort to save money and put things straight. Now he knew, and the knowledge steeled his courage and strengthened his resolve to fight right up to the last. And when he was dead his son, now at Oxford, should carry on the war after him.

It was not fear that made sleep impossible, but the thinking out of new plans for his future. He turned the plans over and over in his mind as he looked down on that white sea of fog.

But now and again his thoughts would hark back to the fallen shield of arms. A queer incident that; something real, something material, and yet not easily explained! An omen, perhaps; a warning of some immediate danger—some tragedy more violent than the steady pressure of adversity.

Further, old Quickerell firmly believed that he had seen this wyvern—the "Polferro Worm," as the writer of the old ballad termed it. Well, he, Charles Bodelliam, would not go so far as to say that he believed in the present-day existence of wyverns—those strange dragons with two legs and barbed tails and forked tongues and scaly wings. Yet even stranger monsters had once existed on this earth, and one could see the bones of them in museums.

"Old Quickerell believes in anything heraldic," said Bodelliam to himself. This was true enough. Wyverns, gryphons, unicorns—all these were real animals to Dan Quickerell who had once been known to complain of the shape of a lion at the Zoo because it did not conform to the heraldic type.

So ran Bodelliam's thoughts in a circle, but always revolving around two central facts; the evils that had come to the Bodelliams after one of them had married the descendant of Alice Polferro, and the fight to get the better of them. But his eyes never left the sea of white fog, and it seemed to him that it was rising, like a tide, creeping higher and higher up the Castle walls.

Then all at once he fancied that it swirled tremendously, and at a point two hundred yards from the window there was a vortex, a funnel-shaped hole, deep and dark and reaching down to the moor itself. And at the bottom of the hole something seemed to move—something gray and then silvery as the moonlight touched it.

There was a humming sound, like the buzz of a gigantic insect, and Bodelliam thought he could distinguish a head and a pair of great wings.

Then the mist poured into the hole and filled it up again. The sound died away and there was silence.

Bodelliam shivered and seated himself by the fire. He lit a cigar and leaned back in the deep, comfortable chair. He did not wish to look out of the window any more.

CHARLES BODELLIAM could could not imagine how the wyvern had gotten into the bedroom, but there it was, standing—or perhaps one should call it sitting by the glowing embers of the fire. It was not so large as Bodelliam would have expected a wyvern to be, but it was too large to have entered either by door or window.

It was perhaps eight feet in height from the top of its head to the claws —like the claws of some enormous bird—that rested on the carpet. It would have been twelve feet from the curved beak to the end of the tail, barbed like the arrow of a bushman, but it economized space by curling its tail around its horny legs. Its body was covered with silvery scales, some of them no larger than a threepenny bit—others as big as saucers.

On the whole it was rather a pleasant and beautiful thing to look at, and Charles Bodelliam, after the first shock of seeing it there, was not frightened of it. He even smiled as the monster raised one huge claw and scratched the embers of the fire into a feeble blaze.

"The nights are getting chilly," he said idiotically.

"It is warmer under the ground," the animal replied. And Bodelliam was neither surprised that it was able to speak, nor that it answered him in good modern English. Without doubt it was supernatural. Possibly it was Alice Polferro herself.

"You live under the ground?" queried Bodelliam politely, and in just the same tone of voice as if he had said "You live in London?"

"Deep—very deep," said the wyvern.

"Miles down, I suppose, where the rocks are red-hot."

The wyvern made no reply to this. Its gray, leathery face wrinkled and it yawned. For several seconds Bodelliam saw the terrible teeth, white as milk, and the red chasm of the throat, and a curious tongue, like a barbed whip. Bodelliam's courage began to falter.

"Why—why have you come here?" he stammered.

"I am going to live here—in your brain. I shall be always with you. Very few people believe in me, and if no one believed in me, I should be dead. I can only exist where there is belief. I am grateful to you—for a shelter above ground."

"Just like Tinkle Bell in Peter Pan. Why not try Mr. Quickerell? He believes in you."

"One of my friends is with Mr. Quickerell."

"Are there more than one of you?" gasped Bodelliam.

"Yes, several. But we die off one by one, as the world gets older and more foolish."

Charles Bodelliam lost his temper. "Look here," he said, "I cannot feed a great brute like you. I've already enough to do to keep the wolf from the door."

"I am easily fed. Think of an ox and it will exist. Place it before me and I will make a meal of it. One ox a day will be sufficient."

Charles Bodelliam stared stupidly at the fire. It was glowing as as though fanned by a wind. The gray monster seemed blood red in the fierce glow of the coals. One great claw moved forward and plucked the heart out of the fire. The flames leaped up to the ceiling, red and yellow flames like tongues—swallowing up the monster and hiding it from sight.

And then, for one moment, Charles Bodelliam saw the agonized face of a woman, the black hair shriveling on her head and bursting into flames. He heard a long, thin, wailing cry. And finally there was nothing; nothing save grayness and silence.

THE butler, who slept in a little room on the first floor of one of the flanking towers of the Castle gate, was aroused from his sleep by the clanging of the bell that hung over his bed. He put on a pair of trousers and an overcoat, lit a lantern, and, thrusting his feet into slippers, swore gently and steadily as he went to the postern gate and opened it.

Two men clothed in fur and leather stood without; strange and alarming creatures they seemed to old Jaines as he saw them in the feeble yellow light against a background of writhing mist.

"Sorry to knock you up, old chap," said one of them, a boy with a fair closely-clipped mustache, "but we've had trouble with our old bus, and have been forced to land. I suppose you couldn't let up sleep in a shed for the night?"

"My master would not hear of such a thing," Jaines replied. "Come in, gentlemen. This is Bodelliam Castle, and there are beds in it."

The name conveyed nothing to the young men, but one of them said: "Dartmoor?"

"No, Cornwall, gentlemen, and not far from the end of it."

"By Jove, that's a lucky escape. The fog's pretty thick on the ground, you know. We reckoned we were over Dartmoor, and when we landed on heather we were sure of it."

Gaines took them into his sitting-room on the ground floor of the flanking tower. He offered them food and drink, but they only wanted sleep. They said they could sleep on the floor, but Jaines would not hear of it. He said there was a room in the "Black Tower," as he called the Castle keep. "A well-aired bed, gentlemen," he murmured, "and Mr. Bodelliam will be pleased to know that you've slept in it."

"Oh, I say, we can't give you all this trouble," laughed the fair-haired boy.

"No trouble at all, gentlemen. Please come along with me, and don't make a noise, for Mr. Bodelliam has the room above you and he is a light sleeper."

They followed him across the courtyard and climbed the spiral stone staircase of the Black Tower. As Jaines opened the door of a room he sniffed and said:

"Something burning, gentlemen. I think I'll go up to the floor above and see if anything is wrong."

CHARLES BODELLIAM lay in bed in one of the rooms of the western wing. His dressing-gown had been alight when Jaines and the two young airmen had dragged him from the smoke and flame. They had found him still sitting in his chair, and apparently stupefied by the smoke. If they had come on the scene a minute later nothing could have saved him. As it was, he had escaped with a few trifling burns. They hurt considerably, but the doctor said there was no danger if he would lie in bed and take things quietly.

Old Quickerell sat by the side of the bed and lectured in a dry, quiet voice.

"The Tower is just like a big chimney," he said, "with a heap of rubbish at the bottom of it. If your seventeenth century ancestor had been content to leave the stone floor and walls alone it would have stood a dozen fires. But he was all for improvements and wooden floors and oak panels, and the inside blazed up like a rocket. It was a fine sight, to my way of thinking."

Charles Bodelliam began to talk of the wyvern—insisted on talking of the wyvern, and that remarkable interview which, according to Charles Bodelliam, had been worth the loss of a dozen castles. For a few moments Quickerell was silent. He was not the man to smash romance with the sledge-hammer of common sense.

No doubt Bodelliam had fallen asleep and the cigar had dropped from his mouth and set light to the carpet. The smoldering had mercifully crept away from him and caught the paneling. But old Quickerell hesitated to destroy a wonderful, a delightful dream.

"All this has been a stroke of luck for you," he exclaimed after a pause.

Bodelliam said that he did not see where the luck came in unless Quickerell would admit the extraordinary luck of not only seeing but speaking to a wyvern. "And you saw it yourself," Bodelliam cried triumphantly.

"I did," lied Quickerell, for he knew now that what he had seen had been an aeroplane, "but I didn't talk with it. Let that be, however. Mr. Bodelliam, you're a rich man; the burning down of the Black Tower has made you so."

"The insurance money will never build it up again."

Dan Quickerell chuckled, thrust his hand into the pocket of his coat, and flung a small lump of yellow metal

onto the bed-quilt. Bodelliam picked it up between the finger and thumb of his bandaged hand.

"Gold?" he queried. "A nugget? Alluvial gold? In Cornwall? No, Quickerell."

"You wouldn't believe in the mine if I showed it to you, Mr. Bodelliam?"

"I should not."

"But you believe in your wyvern?"

"I do."

"Very extraordinary, Mr. Bodelliam. Well, this mine was in the Black Tower, and I should not wonder if Sir Henry Bodelliam were not the man who put it there, when the Roundheads were after his plate and his silver and his gold. He was the man who put in those oak beams and floors and paneling, you've told me."

Charles Bodelliam nodded.

"We have no plate earlier than the time of the Restoration," he said, "but I thought my grandfather had sold it all."

"Well, there must have been a deal of stuff, Mr. Bodelliam. And I doubt if it's all perished, though Jaines said he saw it coming down like golden rain. One or two early sixteenth century pieces—late fifteenth, perhaps—it would not take many of them to give you a fortune. And if they're crushed they can be beaten out again."

Tears came into Bodelliam's eyes and rolled down his scarred cheeks. He thrust out his bandaged hand.

"Quickerell," he gasped, "don't make a fool of me—tell me—just what there is—what you've found."

"You're not to excite yourself, Mr. Bodelliam. I showed you that bit of a nugget so as to lead you gently up to the big find. Yes, in the thickness of the wall, behind the paneling, a few very pretty little pieces—one of them with the London hall-mark for 1480, and none later than the middle of the sixteenth century. I should say they'd be worth a matter of nearly a hundred thousand pounds."

THE blood-red wyvern on its field of gold still hangs on the walls of the Great Hall. But it has been given a place of honor, and exquisitely painted by Rose Quickerell on a larger shield, it hangs by itself in the center of the carved oak screen.

Charles Bodelliam has been told about the aeroplane, and realizes that the arrival of the two young airmen saved his life. But he is still quite certain that it was the wyvern that set the tower on fire, and that the soul of Alice Polferro was in that strange monster, and that this was Alice Polferro's witch-like method of getting even with the bishop who had laid the curse upon her descendants, from one generation to another.

Literally a fancy flight and a flight of fancy—

Wings to Wisdom

BY RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

in our issue of March 1

The Children of Who and Why

IT is not actually on record what "The Thinker," by Rodin, is thinking about. But, on a par with the first man who ever sat down on a tree stump and undertook the serious business of thinking for himself, there is undoubtedly a Who or a Why or a Where or a When or a How or a What or a Whither or Whence searching for an answer in the back of "The Thinker's" mind.

"Who am I?" the first man asked. "And why am I here?".

And the children of the first man have been bothered about it ever since.

In fact it is the one Mystery of Mysteries that has succeeded in engaging the attention of the best minds in any age, and the very best minds of our own age are still trying to come to some kind of satisfactory conclusions on the subject with rather disappointing results.

However, Man is a persistent animal. He has spent several millions of years struggling to reach a point where he can hear the details of a fight or a ball game come out of the mouth of a loud speaker. So it is just possible that he will continue to persist until he has solved the Riddle of the Universe.

Then he will die.

He will die because there will be nothing left to live for, no questions to ask, no mysteries to be solved. And there wouldn't be any fun in a life of that kind.

For Mystery is the very breath of Being and Doing and Going On.

If you doubt this, try to imagine a boy who did not ask questions or an infant who had no interest in solving the mystery of everything and anything it could get into its mouth. When this actually does happen, it is time to call the doctor.

Naturally, every story that appears in Mystery Magazine is a child of Who and Why. The character of the magazine insists upon this and bases its appeal upon man's eternal hunger for mysteries to be solved.

The mysteries, however, will not necessarily be murder mysteries, although the activities of criminal investigators will undoubtedly occupy a fair share of space in our pages. But, as I said to our contributors in the January 15 issue, I do not want Mystery Magazine to read as if it were an extract from the criminal records of the Tombs or Scotland Yard.

Our writers are going to ask Who and Why and When and Where and How and What and Whither and Whence without necessarily punctuating their queries with a bullet or a blade. They are going to give us all kinds of questions to ask and all sorts of mysterious happenings to follow to a satisfactory conclusion.

Yet, always with an eye to pleasing the reader who, in the last analysis, "pays his money and has his choice."

No sane editor ever forgets this. And I hope I am still sane enough to encourage our readers to say exactly what they think regardless of my feelings or predilections.

THE EDITOR.

Who Rideth Alone

By PERCIVAL C. WREN

Author of Beau Geste, The Wages of Virtue, Stepsons of France, etc.

A FOUR PART STORY—PART III

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

MAJOR HENRI DE BEAUJOLAIS, of the Spahis and French Secret Service, operating in the French Sudan, tells the story in part.

While a "volontaire" in the Blue Hussars, he fights a duel with a fellow ranker named Becque, who is a secret agitator against the French. De Beaujolais beats Becque but, years later, hears of him again in Zaguig, a "holy city" on the Algerian fringe of the French Sudan.

It is at this time that Major de Beaujolais, entrusted with a secret and extremely dangerous mission to Emir el Hamel el Kebir, the mysterious head of a powerful confederation of desert tribes, is compelled to start out on his mission, encumbered with the responsibility of the lives of Mary Vanbrugh, an American girl, and Maudie Atkinson, her maid. A sudden Moslem uprising and massacre of Christians in Zaguig inflicts this situation upon the Major, who has been most specifically instructed by his uncle, General Bertrand de Beaujolais, to start out with as small a bodyguard as possible and "no encumbrances whatever." Duty first, last and all the time is his uncle's slogan.

Accompanying Major de Beaujolais is Dufour, Achmet and Djikki, trusted soldiers of France; also Suleiman, an outcast of ugly and treacherous appearance, who has offered to lead the Major to the Great Oasis, and the tents of Emir el Hamel el Kebir because he, Suleiman, having been cast out by the Emir in dubious circumstances, has an ax of his own to grind.

Attacked by Touareg, the Major is shot in the arm and, leaving Dufour, Achmet, Djikki and Suleiman to cover their retreat, the Major, Mary and Maudie make their escape to the Great Oasis. Dufour, Achmet and Djikki are killed, but Suleiman escapes to plot further against the life of the Emir el Hamel el Kebir.

At the Great Oasis, the Major meets the Emir el Hamel el Kebir and his Vizier, both of whom take an instant liking to Mary and Maudie; a liking, that, to the Major's amaze, is apparently reciprocated, so that the making of treaties becomes a matter of secondary consideration. Then, the Major discovers that his old friend Becque is calling upon the Emir with counter proposals similar to his own. So the Major resumes with Becque the duel originally begun in the Blue Hussars. Becque is fatally wounded and dies after a treacherous deathbed attempt on the Major's life.

Then, the Major, having insulted the Emir in a moment of temper, is confronted with the unpleasant necessity of choosing between two evils. The Emir will sign the treaty and give the Major his freedom, but Mary and Maudie must remain with the Emir and his Vizier; or, if he so desires, the Major may buy the freedom of the girls and the Emir's signature to the treaty with his own life—by drinking a cup of poison! The treaty is signed, and the Major, suddenly and dramatically draining the cup, completes his part of the story. It is continued from this point by the author himself.

CHAPTER XVIII

LOST

GOLDEN sand and copper sky; copper sky and golden sand; and nothing else. Nothing to relieve the aching human eye, in all that dreadful boundless waste of blistering earth and burning heaven.

To the bright, tireless eye of the vulture, an infinite speck hung motionless in the empyreal heights of cosmic space was something else—the swaying, tottering, reeling figure of a man.

The vulture watched and waited, knowing, either from marvelous instinct or from more marvelous mental process, that he would not have long to wait.

As the man fell, the predatory bird, with motionless wing, slid down the sky in graceful, circling sweep, and again hung motionless, a little nearer to his quarry. As the man rose, tottered on, staggered and again fell, the vulture repeated its maneuver, and again hung motionless nearer to its prey.

Would the still figure move again? Was it yet too feeble to resist the onslaught of the fierce beak that should tear the eyeballs from the living head?

The vulture dropped a few thousand feet lower.

WITH a groan, the recumbent man drew up his knees, turned on his side, planted his hands on the hot sand and, after kneeling prone for a minute, struggled once more to his feet and bravely strove to climb the long billow of soft, loose sand that lay before him.

Beneath the hood of his dirty white *kafiya* head-dress, bound round with *agal* ropes of camel-hair, his dark face was that of a dead man, the eyes glazed, the protruding tongue black, the cracked skin tight across the jutting bones. Through the rags of his filthy *jellabia,* his arms and shoulders showed lean and black; his bare legs were those of a skeleton. An Arab scarecrow, a *khafiyul,* endowed with a spark of life.

At the top of the ridge the man swayed, put his hand above his eyes, and peered out into the dancing heat-haze ahead.

Burning sand and burning sky!

Not even a mirage to give a faint hope that it might not be what it was, a last added torture.

He sank to the ground.

An hour later, the vulture did the same, and settled himself, with huddled head and drooping wings, to continue his patient watch with unwinking eye.

Anon he strutted toward the body, with clumsy gait and foolishly jerking head, his cruel hooked beak open in anticipation.

"ALLAH! What is that? Look, brothers, something white on yonder sandhill—and a vulture!"

The speaker reined in his camel and pointed, his long-sighted gaze fixed on the far-distant spot where he had seen something that to European eyes would have been invisible.

Lowering his outstretched hand, he unslung his rifle as the other Touareg came to a halt around him.

"A trap, perchance," growled another of the Wolves of the Desert from behind the heavy blue veil that hid all but his eyes.

"Go, thou, and spring it then," said the leader, and the score or so of raiders sat montionless on their camels, while the black-faced man rode off.

Cautiously scanning the terrain from the top of each sandhill, he circled round the motionless bundle of rags, as the vulture flapped heavily away to alight at a safe and convenient distance.

After a long and searching stare around him, the rider approached the body, his ready rifle in both hands. He brought the camel to its knees.

As he dismounted, the rest of the band rode toward the spot. By the time they reached it the scout had turned the man upon his back and discovered that he was unarmed, unprovided, foodless, waterless, and utterly valueless. There was not so much as a rag of clothing that was worth the trouble of removing.

"A miserable *miskeen* indeed," said the scout to the leader of the band as he rode up. Not a *mitkal* on the dog's carcass. Not even an empty purse."

"Curse the son of Satan!" replied the leader, and spat.

"There may be something on his camel, if we follow his tracks back to where he left its carcass," observed a lean and hawk-faced rogue, who was trying to force his beautiful white *mehara* to tread upon the body.

"Yea, a sack of pearls, thou fool," agreed the leader and added: "Come on! Shall we waste the day chattering around this carrion?"

As the band rode off, he of the negroid countenance jumped on to his kneeling beast, and as it lurched to its feet he emitted a joyous whoop and, either in light-hearted playfulness or as a mark of his disgust at the poverty of so poor a thing, he discharged his rifle at the body.

The body jerked and quivered and, as the robber rode off, writhed over onto its face, to the annoyance of the observant vulture.

Not a man of this band of mysterious blue-veiled robbers, the terrible "Forgotten of God," looked around, and all rode on as heartlessly indifferent to the dreadful fate of this fellow desert-dweller as if it might not well be their own upon the morrow's morrow.

Life is very cheap in the desert!

CHAPTER XIX

EL HAMEL

TOWARD evening of the same day, a desert caravan of nomad Arabs, "peaceful herdsmen, armed to the teeth and desiring to fight no foe of greater strength than themselves, followed in the track of the Touareg raiders.

At their head rode their aged Sheikh, a venerable white-bearded gentleman, with the noble face of a Biblical patriarch, and much of the philosophy, standards, ideals and habits of such—a modern Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob.

Beside him rode an Esau, a hairy man, a mighty hunter before the Lord. In his dark face was nothing noble, save in so far as a look of forceful and ruthless determination makes for nobility of countenance.

"Yea—of a surety are we safest in the very tracks of these Sons of Shaitan, these Forgotten of Allah—may they burn in Gehennum," said the Sheikh to his companions, and, turning on his camel, he looked back at the long and straggling column whereon the bobbing, rolling *bassourabs* showed that prized and honored women rode hidden from the eyes of men.

"Thou art right, Wise One," replied the burly younger man. "No bullet enters the hole made by another bullet, and no knife nor spear strikes a bleeding wound. No other raiding party will follow this one, nor will these Enemies of God turn about in their own tracks."

AND it came to pass that, as the sun began to act, and the old Sheikh prepared to halt the caravan for the evening prayer, when all would dismount and, kneeling in long lines behind their leader, would follow him in devout supplication to Allah, their heads bowed to the sand in the direction of Mecca, the eyes of his companion, called Suleiman the Strong, fell upon the bundle of rags on the distant sandhill.

"By the Beard of the Prophet," he exclaimed, pointing, "a man! And he may not be dead, or that vulture would be at work."

"If it is one of the 'Forgotten of God' he will soon be dead," said the

aged Sheikh, laying his hand upon the silver hilt of the curved dagger that was stuck through the front of the broad girdle.

"Not too soon, let us hope, my father," growled Suleiman. "He may live long enough to suffer something of what my brother suffered at Touareg hands before his brave soul went to the bosom of the Prophet. May dogs defile the graves of their grandfathers!"

The two rode to the spot where the man lay, followed by several of the caravan guards, fighting-men armed with flint-lock guns, rifles, or long lances and straight, heavy swords.

"He is no Touareg, but a victim of the Touareg," said Suleiman, slipping down from his camel without stopping to make it kneel. "See, they have shot him, and he with scarcely any blood to flow.

"He may not be dead even yet," he added, after placing his ear to the man's heart and holding the bright blade of his sword to the latter's nostrils. "He is only shot through the shoulder. Shall I cut his throat?"

"No. Give him water," replied the Sheikh, and crying, *"Adar-ya-yan! Adar-ya-yan!"* to his camel, brought it to his knees. He who is merciful to the poor and needy is acceptable to Allah."

"Go, one of you, for Hadji Abdul Salam," he added, turning to the impassive fighting-men, who looked on with calm indifference, viewing this evidence of desert tragedy, this agony and death of a fellow man, with as much interest as they would the fall of a sparrow to the ground.

Taking his leather water bottle from where it hung at the high peak of his saddle, the Sheikh untied the neck of it and dropped a little of the desert's most priceless and precious treasure upon the black lips and tongue.

HADJI ABDUL SALAM, a fat and (for an Arab) jolly rogue, rode up from beside the camel that bore his two wives in a gaily striped *bassourab* and, putting on an air of wisdom, examined the body. He had a great reputation in the Tribe, by reason of having cured the Sheikh of a mortal sickness by the right use of a hair of the Prophet's beard, a cup of water in which was soaked a paper bearing a very special extract from the *Q'ran*, and the application of a very hot iron to the old gentleman's stomach. He also had a very valuable prescription for ophthalmia—muttering another Q'ranic extract seven times, and spitting in the patient's eyes seven times after each mutter.

This learned physician pronounced life extinct.

"Starved to death," he said. "Then died of thirst. Whereafter he received a wound which killed him."

This bulletin satisfied all present, save, apparently, the corpse, whose eyelids fluttered as the blackened tongue moved feebly in a kind of lip-licking motion.

"But I have brought him back to life, as you see," the good doctor promptly added, and his great reputation was enhanced.

AND alive, just alive, the foundling proved to be.

Curiously, and inconsequently enough, and yet again naturally enough, the old Sheikh set great store by the recovery of the man whom he saved.

Had he not thus thwarted the Touareg, undone what they had done, plucked a brand from their burning, and was not this human salvage his, and a record and proof of his virtue? The Sheikh had reached an age at which proofs of virtue may soon be wanted in the sight of Allah.

He had the sick and wounded man rolled up in tent-coverings, splinted with tent poles and slung at the side of a good *djemel* baggage-camel.

"See that the dog dies, you," whispered Suleiman the Strong to the camel-man in charge of the *djemel*, as the caravan moved on again, after the evening prayer had been said. "If he be alive at the next halt, squeeze his throat a little. On thy head be it!"

Why add a burden and a useless mouth to a caravan crossing a waterless desert?

A little later the Sheikh sent for this camel-man.

"See that this stranger lives," said he. "The succor of the afflicted is pleasing to Allah the Compassionate, the All-merciful. On thy head be it!"

ABDULLAH, the camel-man, felt that there was altogether too much on his head, but the old Sheikh was still the Sheikh, and he had better "hear his words" and put prudence before pleasure. Abdullah was a good killer and, like the rest of us, enjoyed doing that which he could do well.

At the next halt the foundling was still alive and was distinctly seen to swallow the water that was poured into his mouth.

Suleiman the Strong looked at Abdullah-el-Jemmal, the camel-man and, with a decidedly unpleasant smile, touched the hilt of his knife. The old Sheikh praised Abdullah and said it was well. Of this, Abdullah felt doubtful.

AFTER a long rest at the next halt, the Unknown was a little better, even if his wound was worse. He drank *halib* and water greedily and looked about him. But if he could use his eyes, he could not use his tongue, or else he did not understand what was said to him.

After each halt, he grew a little stronger, and by the time the tribe reached an oasis, he could totter about on his feet and wash his wound for himself.

And daily the Unknown grew in strength, and by the time the caravan reached its destination, some weeks later, he could ride a camel and could almost fend for himself.

But his wound grew worse, and for months she seemed likely to die, for he could not get at the hole in his back, whereas the flies could.

The Tribe called him "El Gherib," The Stranger, and "El Hamel," the Foundling, The Lost One, and waited for the old Sheikh to tire of him.

CHAPTER XX

THE GOING OF SULEIMAN THE STRONG

BUT as the months went by the old Sheikh's fancy seemed to turn to infatuation, and far from tiring of the man and ceasing to interest himself in his existence, he cherished and cared for him. Undeniably, however, El Hamel was a remarkable person. In the first place, he was Afflicted of Allah and quite dumb; in the second place, he was unbelievably skilful with a rifle and with the throwing-knife; in the third place, he was incredibly strong; in the fourth, he was a most notable horseman and horsemaster, even among Arab horsemen; in the fifth, he was indubitably a far better doctor than the *hakim* himself; and lastly, and most remarkable of all, he was a magician, and a magician of power.

This wonderful great gift had come to light in this wise: The Sheikh had lost his famous amulet, a silver box wherein reposed a Hair of the Beard of the Prophet, bought in Mecca for an enormous sum, as well

as an extremely holy and potent *hejab* or charm, a knuckle-bone of one of the holiest *marabouts* who had ever adorned this terrestrial sphere.

Surely no one could have sunk so low as to have stolen so holy a thing from the Sheikh's own person, and so he must have lost it. It was gone, anyhow, and great was the commotion throughout the big *douar* (encampment) and great the rewards offered for its recovery.

ON THE seventh evening from the day of the loss, El Hamel, that sad and silent man, sat, as usual, before the little low, black tent that was his and looked remote and wise. Cross-legged, on his small striped carpet, silent and inscrutable, he made a goat skin thong for his sandal and, anon, regarded Infinity and the doings of his fellow-men.

A goat-herd slave-boy sat and watched him, one Moussa el R'Orab, Moussa the Crow.

Anon the old Sheikh, terribly upset by his loss, and still more upset by the evil augury of such a loss, strolled past the seated man, who salaamed with deep respect.

The Sheikh paused, turned, seated himself beside his protégé and talked about his loss. Suleiman the Strong strolled by, accompanied by his good friend, Hadji Abdul Salam, and from time to time various other prominent citizens of this tent-city joined the growing circle of listeners and respectful talkers.

IT WAS the first time since the Sheikh's loss that the evening *faddhl* had taken place outside the tent of El Hamel, a thing that occurred rather frequently.

The talk dragged on interminably, and the great full moon rose and illuminated the oasis, and the groves of date palms, the hundreds of low, black, camel-hair tents of various sizes, the flocks and herds of goats and camels, the gossiping groups, the women at the cooking-fires, the water-drawers at the *shaduf*, and a wide ring of watchful sentries.

SUDDENLY the dumb man raised both of his clenched fists above his head, pointed to the moon, again to where the sun had set, and then threw his open hands dramatically towards the sky in an attitude of beseeching prayer.

Soon a mass of snow-white foam issued from his dumb lips and flecked his black beard, and his eyes rolled back until only the whites showed.

He looked terrible, and the Hadji Abdul Salam prepared to become professional. The grave Arabs stared in awed wonder at this manifestation of the work of *djinns*, spirits, or devils, and a deep silence fell.

The man seemed to recover, put his hand behind into his tent, brought out a vessel of water, and drank.

He then stared with starting eyeballs at the ground before his feet. All eyes followed his gaze. Nothing but flat, trodden sand; no scorpion, snake, nor horned toad was there. The dumb man made passes with his hands above the spot at which he stared. He poured water on the ground, as though pouring libations to the memory of departed *friends*.

More passes, more pouring forth of water, more impassioned gesticulations toward the unanswering sky, and then, did their eyes deceive them? Or even as the man sat, with eyes and hands strained beseechingly aloft, did a gleam of silver show through the sand, and *did the lost box of the Sheikh rise up through the earth at their very feet*, before their very eyes, as they stared and stared, incredulously?

It did.

The large audience sat for seconds as though turned to stone, and then

a shudder ran through it, a gasping sigh escaped it, and, as the old Sheikh's quivering hand tentatively went out toward this magic thing, a great cry went up, so that men came running.

"YES, brother," agreed Hadji Abdul Salam, as he and Suleiman the Strong, followed at a respectful distance by one Moussa el R'Orab, Moussa the Crow, goat-herd and admiring slave of El Hamel, walked away in the direction of the tent of the former. "It is, as thou sayest, time that he died."

"I will let that accursed dog Abdillah-el-Jemmal, the camel-driver, know that unless this dumb devil and father of devils dies before the next moon, it will be the last moon that Abdullah sees," growled Suleiman, grinding his teeth. Not for nothing was he known as El Ma'ian—He who has the Evil Eye.

"He has marvelous powers and the strength of ten," observed the *Hakim*. "But there are draughts which are more powerful than he—a little something of which I know—in his *cous-cous* or curds."

"The cunning dog has a portion of all his cooked food eaten by Moussa, the goat-boy, long before he tastes it," was the moody reply. "The hungry Moussa eats right willingly, knowing that none try to poison him who hath a food-taster. No, it is a task for Abdullah, a stab in the dark."

"And what would the Sheikh do?" smiled the good *hakim*.

"Impale Abdullah, living, on a stake, after hearing my evidence," replied Suleiman, "and thus shall we be rid of two nuisances at one blow."

BUT Suleiman the Strong quickly saw that he was going too fast, and that he was proposing to Abdul Salam a risky thing, the doing of a dangerous deed for which the *hakim* saw no present reason, and in which he saw no personal profit either.

Suleiman affected to be jesting, and turned the conversation to the miracle, to which he alluded as a rascally trick.

But it appeared that neither he nor the worthy doctor could offer the slightest suggestion as to how the "trick" was done, nor propound the vaguest outline of a theory in elucidation of the mystery.

Nor could any man of the few scoffers who were among the intimates, toadies, and followers of Suleiman the Strong. And the remainder of the Tribe believed in the Dumb Magician to a man.

NEVERTHELESS, there are those who, having beheld a similar miracle in other parts of the world, say that the miracle-worker excavates a hole at the required spot and then fills it with some material that expands rapidly and quickly when made wet, some such substance, for example, as *bhoosa*, yeast, saw-dust, grain or bran.

They aver that the miracle-monger presses the substance tightly together between four stones, covers it with a layer of sand, places the object (which is to spring miraculously out of the earth) upon the pressed expansive material, and lightly covers all with dust, earth and sand. The hour strikes and soon after the material is wetted, up comes the hidden object.

AS THE infatuation of the old Sheikh waxed, so did the jealousy and wrath of Suleiman the Strong. And it grew apparent to all men that the same *osar* could not much longer contain both him and El Hamel, the Foundling, the Dumb Magician, the Given of Allah.

Even to the Sheikh it grew clear that one of them must go, so trucu-

lent, surly, outrageous did Suleiman increasingly become. And the old man's heart was heavy within him, for he loved his strong, wise Foundling, this big man of dignity and strength and magic power, whom he himself had found and saved, and he feared the forceful and influential Suleiman.

But one of them must go, or there would be quarrels and strife parties and factions in that united tribe.

It was Suleiman the Strong who went.

And he nearly went by *sirath*, the bridge that spans hell.

ONE evening, the sullen brooding temper that seemed to smolder behind his cruel eyes blazed up, and he was as one possessed by *djinns*.

The old Sheikh was standing by the lance (which, planted before his tent, bore his *bairaq* or flag and ensign of rule), talking to El Hamel and others of his favorites.

To him came Suleiman, a *mish'ab* camel-stick in his hand, and a black, sullen scowl on his face. He was followed by fat and smiling Hakim Abdul Salam, Abdullah-el-Jemmal, and certain others.

Thrusting into the circle of gravely conversing elders, Suleiman confronted the Sheikh and poured forth a torrent of indignant and minatory words, pointing as he did so at the impassive, silent El Hamel, his outstretched shaking hand almost touching the latter's face.

The Sheikh rebuked him sharply and raised his hand to point. "Go, thou growling dog, or by the Beard of the Prophet . . ."

AND then the impossible happened. For, even as the venerable Sheikh uttered the word "Beard", the jealousy-maddened Suleiman seized the long gray beard of the sheikh in his left hand, shook him to and fro, and raised aloft his right hand, clutching the *mish'ab*, as though about to strike!

But it was Sidi El Hamel who struck.

With incredible swiftness and terrible force, he smote the impious madman with his clenched fist, and men gasped in wonder as Suleiman the Strong reeled back staggering, and fell, apparently dead.

"Bind him," stammered the Sheikh, almost speechless with rage at the unbelievable, unforgivable insult.

"I will have him impaled, dead or alive," and the old man trembled with wrath and indignation.

Sidi El Hamel ventured to intervene. Touching his breast and forehead, he salaamed to the Sheikh, joined his hands in entreaty and then, stooping, seized Suleiman by the arm and partly dragging, partly carrying him, bore him to where the women crowded round the draw-well.

At the foot of a kind of palisade of split palm-trunks that banked up the earth around the stone-built mouth of the well, he flung the man down, and made signs to those who had brought camel-ropes with which to bind him that they should secure him to the wooden wall.

Tearing off Suleiman's *burnous*, El Hamel raised him to his feet and held him upright, while his outspread arms were lashed to the tops of two posts and his feet secured to a stump by a stout cord that passed round it and them.

WHAT was the Magician about to do? Would he leave the sacrilegious villain, the almost parricidal criminal, to die of starvation and thirst, or was he going to shoot the dog? Men crowded round, with growls of indignant wrath, and the women fled to the tents of their lords.

El Hamel dashed water, from a dug-out trough, at the face of Sulei-

man and waited. In a few minutes he recovered his senses, opened his eyes, and stared about him. The Magician stepped back several yards and motioned the onlookers to stand aside. He drew his knife.

Ah! He was going to give an exhibition of knife-throwing, to plant the dagger in the black heart of the dog who had most foully insulted and outraged his Chief and Master, Allah's representative to the Tribe, the Prophet's Vicar upon earth, the Giver of Salt. It was well.

THE Sheikh approached and stood beside El Hamel. That great man removed his *burnous*, balanced the dagger upon his hand, and, with a swift movement, threw.

The silence was broken by the sound of a swift intaking of breath as the knife stuck and quivered, not in the broad breast of Suleiman the Strong, but in the wood beside his right ear.

El Hamel had missed for once! No matter—the more torture for the foul Suleiman.

With a merry laugh, Hadji Abdul Salam tendered his own knife, that El Hamel might throw again.

"This one balances well, Sidi," said he.

El Hamel took the knife, balanced it upon the palm of his great hand, and, with a lightning swoop of his huge arm, threw.

The knife quivered in wood beside the left ear of Suleiman the Strong.

Again there was the sound of swift intaking of breath, and the good *hakim* giggled like a girl.

"Try again, my son, and may Allah guide thine arm," said the Sheikh and placed his great silver-hilted dagger in the hand of El Hamel.

"Make an end, thou cross-eyed dog," cried Suleiman the Strong, and stared sternly at his slayer, though his face had taken on a sickly greenish hue.

Once again the Magician poised the knife and his great powerful body, and threw.

With a thud, the heavy knife stuck in the post above Suleiman's head, and all but touched it. The three knives seemed to hold and frame his face in glistening metal.

And then it dawned upon the watchers that El Hamel was *not* missing his mark, and all men marveled.

Suleiman the Strong stood like a statue.

Abdullah - el - Jemmal respectfully tendered a long, lean blade. A moment later it stood out from beside the shoulder of Suleiman, its point buried in wood, its blade an inch from his flesh. Another stuck exactly opposite that. A dozen knives were offered to the thrower, and in as many minutes stood in pairs on either side of the motionless man.

Suddenly he cried, "Enough! Make an end, in the name of Allah the Merciful, the Compassionate," and, as the thrower raised another knife, he collapsed and hung forward, fainting, in his bonds.

But El Hamel had heard from Moussa the Crow of plotted poisonings, and the encompassing of the death of the kindly Sheikh, by the vilest treachery and ingratitude.

Striding to the man, he again dashed water at his face, and soon Suleiman the Strong was strong once more, and held himself erect.

"Make an end, Sidi," he said. "In the Name of the Prophet make an end!"

"As thou wouldst have made an end!" screamed Moussa el R'Orab, pointing, and Hakim Abdul Salam eyed the boy sharply.

El Hamel pulled out the Sheikh's knife from where it stuck above Suleiman's head, and Suleiman closed

his eyes and awaited the cutting of his throat.

El Hamel took the knife to where the old Sheikh stood and returned it to him, touching his forehead and breast as he did so.

He then made the sign of a man putting a rifle to his shoulder to fire it, and pointed to his tent, and Moussa the Crow sped thither and brought him the fine Italian magazine-rifle that the Sheikh had bestowed upon his favorite.

Men smiled and nodded. So this was how Suleiman the Strong was to die!

Throwing the rifle to his shoulder, El Hamel pointed it at the face of Suleiman the Strong.

"Look upon thy death, thou dog!" cried the Sheikh, and Suleiman opened his eyes.

"*Now* make an end, Sidi," he begged, "in the Sacred Name of God," and El Hamel fired rapidly five times.

Suleiman the Strong sank to the ground, untouched, the cords that fastened his wrists severed against the posts and hanging idly.

El Hamel pointed out into the desert.

"Yea, go, thou dog!" cried the old Sheikh. "Thou bitter, tentless dog, go forth and scavenge. With all that is thine, begone within the hour," and El Hamel nodded in approval, drew his hand across his throat significantly, and pointed again.

The feet of Suleiman the Strong were untied, and with blows and curses he was driven to his tents.

CHAPTER XXI

THE MIRACLE OF MIRACLES

WHEN he departed, well within the allotted hour, he was followed by a flight of stones, some of the best-aimed of which came from the hand of the good physician, Abdul Salam.

But Hadji Abdul Salam thereafter fancied that El Hamel eyed him unduly, and perhaps more critically, than a *mou'abbir*, a pious and learned man, should be eyed by a desert Foundling.

And so the fame and honor of Sidi el Hamel, the Magician, the Given of Allah, grew apace, and his standing and importance in the tribe waxed with them.

More and more the Sheikh depended upon him, and more and more the Sidi strove for the common weal.

He trained riflemen until a few were almost as skilful as himself, many were as good as Marbruk ben Hassan the Lame, hitherto undisputed best shot of the tribe, and all (who possessed rifles) were far above the desert average.

Dumb though he was, he also taught them, patiently and slowly, how to attack unscathed, instead of charging wildly into a hail of bullets.

Hakim Abdul Salam, who knew nothing more than the administering of *zarnikh*, an acid concoction, to sick camels and the muttering of charms over sick horses, looked on with merry, laughing face and unsmiling eyes.

WHEN the day dawned, of which the old Sheikh feared he would not see the night, he gathered his *ekhwans* and elders and chief men of the tribe about his couch and bade them regard the Sidi el Hamel as Regent of the tribe during the many remaining years of the childhood and youth of his son, and commanded that his *aba* should descend upon the shoulders of the Sidi during the boy's minority.

Upon the Sidi's hand he placed his ring, engraved with the sacred seal, in token of his power, and lifting up

his voice he blessed him in the Name of Allah and of Mahomet his Prophet, ending with the words, *"Rahmal ullahi Allahim,"* "the peace of God be upon him."

And the first "Amen" was that of Hakim Abdul Salam.

A LITTLE later the old man was gathered to his fathers and was buried with great honor and much mourning in the *kouba* by the little mosque, which stood near the oasis and *qsar*, the headquarters and depot of this semi-nomadic tribe.

The great fast of Ramzan followed, and at the end of that weary month, and on the occasion of the great feast that marked its termination, the Sidi (accepted by all men as Sheikh Regent) worked a new and wondrous miracle.

He worked it upon himself. For, as all stood awaiting the appearance of the new moon of the next month, he strode forth before them, and with upraised arms stretched forth his hands toward the horizon.

He then turned toward the watching, waiting assembly and pointed to his mouth. What was about to happen? All stared and wondered in silence.

The moon rose and in that instant the miracle was worked, for the dumb Sheikh, Sid el Hamel, the Magician, opened his mouth and, in deep, sonorous voice, intoned the *shehada*.

Across the deep silence of the desert and the awe-stricken throng rolled the solemn words, *"As hadu illa Illaha ill Allah wa as hadu inna Mahommed an rasul Allah,"* and, as he turned in the direction of the *kubla* at Mecca and recited the *fatha*, the opening *sura* of the *Q'ran*, the people fell upon their faces.

The Dumb had spoken.

CHAPTER XXII

THE NEW POWER

THEREAFTER the Sheikh, Sidi el Hamel, spoke seldom and briefly. He uttered only short orders, curt replies, concise comments. It almost seemed as though speech hurt him, and that his long silence, perhaps the silence of a lifetime, caused his Arabic to be halting, like the speech of a man who has sojourned in foreign parts for many years, not once in all that time speaking the language of his people.

But now that the miracle had come to pass and he could speak, his rule and influence became more powerful; and he trained his fighting-men more easily; rebuked and punished evil-doers; gave orders and instruction in agricultural industry, animal management, tribal policies, and pursued his strange fads of health preservation, sanitation, care of domestic beasts, and justice to all prisoners and captives, mercy to slaves, women and other animals.

Nor would he ever act as *Iman* and lead the prayers, leaving that pious duty to Hadji Abdul Salam, who on such occasions contrived to look as holy as Sidi Mohammed ben Ali, the Reformer of Islam.

IT was not very long before the value of the Sheikh el Hamel's innovations was proven. One of his wonderful old desert-men, Yakoub-who-can-live-without-water, arrived one night on foot, his camel lying dead a day's journey to the northwest, with news of the great Touareg band that made this the southernmost point of its annual journey in search of plunder.

The *ekhwans* gathered at the tent of Sheikh el Hamel, and each spoke his mind in turn, the oldest first.

Some were for following ancient custom and leaving the *douar* to un-

hindered plundering by the Touareg. The sooner they got what they wanted, the sooner they would be gone. The less they were thwarted, the less bloodthirsty would they be. The very pick of the youths, girls, and children might be sent off into the desert, with the very best of the camels, horses and goats, but not too many must go, lest the Touareg wax suspicious and torture the elders until someone break down and confess.

Some were for drawing up as imposing an array of armed camel-men, horsemen and infantry as was possible, and letting them hover near, in full view of the Touareg, in the hope that, as sometimes happened, the robbers would decide not to overprovoke so dangerous a force, but to rob reasonably and justly, leaving the victims a fair residue of their property, the means of subsistence, and many of their young relatives.

One or two, including Marbruk ben Hassan the Lame, showing that the Sheikh el Hamel's lessons in Minor Tactics of War had borne fruit, actually wanted to put up a genuine fight, receive the visitors with volleys of rifle-fire, and if they did not succeed in driving them off, see the thing through and die in defence of tent and child.

"And what of tent and child when you are dead?" inquired the Sheikh el Hamel.

Marbruk ben Hassan the Lame shrugged his enormous shoulders.

"What of them in any case, Sidi?" he asked. "Shall our eyes behold their defilement or, closed in brave death, see nothing of their shame and misery?"

"What says the good Hadji Abdul Salam, the Learned and Holy One?" asked the Sheikh.

The Learned and Holy One thought it would be a sound move for all the wealthy and important men of the Tribe to clear out for a space, with all that was theirs. After a sojourn in the desert, away to the southeast, they could return, console the survivors, and help to clear up the mess.

IT seemed sound sense to several aged patriarchs, who had seen too much of the Touareg and his ways to have any desire to see more.

And all having spoken and given the counsel that their experience, their courage, their hope and their caution prompted, the Sheikh el Hamel lifted up his voice and gave decision.

"We will not flee," he said. "We will not send the best of what is ours out into the desert. We will not leave the Tribe and go afar off with what is ours. We will not make a show of strength and watch the enemy while he robs us. We will not defend the oasis."

All stared in silence upon this enigmatical strong man, the Sheikh Regent of the Tribe, the Sheikh Magician.

"We will go and find our enemy," he concluded, "and fall upon him and destroy him utterly."

And in the silence that followed, Marbruk ben Hassan fired his rifle into the air.

"*Wallahi!*" he cried. "Our Sheikh is a *man*, by Allah!"

"We will leave not one of them alive to return and tell the tale," said the Sheikh again.

"*Inshallah*," murmured the *ekhwans* doubtfully, and the Sheikh strode away, calling for the chosen leaders of the fighting-men and the aged scout Yakoub, who should be their guide.

To these he made a brief speech in short, curt sentences, and illustrated his meaning by the ancient method of the writing-on-the-sand. Around a stone which represented the Touareg camp he drew a circle

with his knife and then a smaller circle within it, and then another. And to each leader-of-a-score he spoke in turn, each hearing his words, smiling and replying:

"It shall be so!"

AN hour later these men, each followed by a score of men for whom he also had drawn a writing-on-the-sand, assembled at the northwest corner of the oasis and, led by the Sheikh el Hamel and the ancient guide, rode forth in orderly array by the light of the moon.

CHAPTER XXIII

EL HABIBKA

ONCE again was it proven that attack is the best defence and that an invaluable principle of strategy is expressed in the apothegm: "Put yourself in your enemy's place, and think as he would think."

The Sheikh Magician was well aware that the Touareg attacks at dawn, and therefore expects to be attacked at dawn.

For this reason he attacked at evening, when cooking-fires were alight, food was being prepared, "tents" were being made with camel-rug and sage-brush, camels were being fed and watered at the *ghadir*, and all men busy.

Well aware, moreover, that the correct and orthodox attack is a wild rush and a hack-and-stab mêlée, wherein mounted men expect to ride down and overcome dismounted men, unprepared and at a disadvantage, he made a most incorrect and unorthodox attack, wherein a complete circle of hidden riflemen opened fire and shot down an enemy who rushed about in great excitement and in full view, as he prepared to receive the said wild rush of mounted men that never came.

Instead of this, an ever-closing circle of accurate rifle-fire ringed them about, and offered no concentrated body of foemen upon which they might charge.

Always many were firing while some were crawling nearer.

Always many were crawling nearer while yet more were firing.

And from every point of the compass came the thudding bullets and the stealthily approaching men.

At which point of this unbroken circle should they rush? Where was the great ring thickest or thinnest? Nowhere.

From time to time a Targui brave, with a shout of *"Follow me! Ul-Ul-Ul-Allah Akbar!"* would dash forward at the head of a few swordsmen, toward some part of the ring of fire, only to fall with his followers ere steel could be blooded.

And, from point to point of the attack, rushed the Sheikh Magician, and wherever he paused and emptied the magazine of his rifle, men fell fast. He seemed to be everywhere at once, and to see everything at a glance. He both fought and led.

He alone kept to his feet, and scarcely a man of his well-trained force raised more than his head from the ground, even when wriggling forward a few yards, that he might fire again from behind bush or stone yet nearer to the foe, silhouetted against his campfires or striving to capture and mount his beast.

Thus no attacker shot his brother on the opposite side of the circle, and no attacker suffered from the ill-aimed fire of the Touareg who endeavored to imitate the tactics of their assailants.

WHEN, here and there, an excited follower of the Sheikh Magician, spurred by his presence to a desire

to distinguish himself, would kneel up to rise beside his leader, he found himself flung back to earth and to remembrance of the fact that his sole business was to creep and shoot, to creep ever nearer and to shoot ever straighter, until disciplined co-operative tactics defeated uncoordinated effort, and the well-used rifle asserted its superiority over the sword, the spear and the casual gun.

And so the net drew tighter, the end came in sight, and the cool brain of the Sheikh Magician triumphed over the hot courage and tradition-bolstered invincibility of the terrible Touareg.

Not until the battle was fairly won and the victory inevitable did human nature triumph over discipline, and his followers, with a wild yell, rose as one man and rushed upon the doomed remnant of their foe.

And not till this moment did they sustain a casualty.

As the moon looked down upon the scene of the battle, and beheld the Sheikh's followers, drunk with joy, intoxicated with the heavy fumes of victory, feasting and rejoicing about the campfires that had been lighted by their dead or captured foes, it saw a sight more horrible than that presented by the corpse of any man slain in the fight; more horrible than that of all the corpses piled together, and they were many.

A man had been tortured. His torturers must have been at their foul and ghastly work, even as the first shot was fired by the encircling foe, for he was still incredibly alive although he had no face and was otherwise mutilated beyond belief or description.

With his own rifle the Sheikh Magician put an end to this defiled creature's sufferings, and then turned to where the shouts of some of his followers indicated that another victim of the bestial savagery of the Touareg had been found.

THIS man, trussed like a fowl, had evidently been awaiting his turn. He was untouched by knife, but almost dead from starvation, thirst and cruel treatment.

The Sheikh Magician made him his own special care. Perhaps he thought of the time when he himself had been saved from death at the eleventh hour, and would mete out to this apparently dying man the measure that had been his.

With his own hand he poured water from his own *zemzimayah* upon the face and mouth of the Touareg's prisoner, cut the cords that bound him and chafed his limbs. As he did so, his face was suffused with a fine glow of human and tender sympathy, adorned with a look of brotherly love, and animated with a new and generous fire.

Raising the body into a sitting posture, he put his arms about it, and embraced it in true native fashion, as might an Arab father the body of his son.

BENEATH the mask of Arab dignity and gravity, a repressed soul shone forth and sought brief expression in a moment of wild emotionalism.

The moon had seen the fierce tigress paw her helpless cub, the savage lion lick its wounded mate, the terrible and appalling gorilla weep above its slaughtered brother, and it beheld this fierce and blood-stained avenger sitting among the dead and crooning nurse-like above this inanimate salvage of the slaughter he had made.

ENCAMPED near the scene of his victory, the bodies of his foes given to the vulture and the jackal, the wounds of his followers tended by his

own hand, the Sheikh set himself to win back to life the man whom he had saved from the knife of the torturer.

Scores and scores slain, dozens dying, and this one to be nursed back to life even as he himself had been; this one to be dragged back from the portals of the House of the Dead.

As he himself had done, the almost dead man made a brave struggle for life, and, one day, opened his eyes in staring wonder upon his saviour.

The Sheikh laid his finger on the bloodless lips, sent all men away, and remained long alone with his piece of human salvage from the ocean of the desert, and its storm of war.

They named him *El Nazil*, the Newcomer, and later *El Habibka*, the Friend, as he became the chosen friend of the Sheikh.

In honor of his incredible victory over the dread Touareg, they gave the Sheikh el Hamel the name of El Kebir, the Lion. And even as the old Sheikh had delighted to honor his foundling, El Hamel, the Gift of Allah, so did the Sheikh Magician delight to honor him whom he had thus saved and brought back to life.

WHEN he and his fighting-men returned to the oasis encampment, to be welcomed by the heart-stirring *"Ulla-la-een! Ulla-la-een!"* the wild, shrill trilling of the women, who screamed aloud as they rattled forefingers up and down against the teeth of their opened mouths, he propped the man up with his right hand, decked him in clean robes of respect, and with his own hand fed him, from time to time, with tit-bits from his own savory stew of goat.

The Tribe saw that their great Sheikh, the Great Magician, the Gift of Allah, yea, the Beloved of Allah the Merciful, the Compassionate, delighted to honor the Unknown, even as he himself had been honored when unknown; and the tribe realized that a great bond of sympathy existed between the Sheikh and the Tentless One, in that the latter was dumb, even as the Sheikh himself had been!

Perhaps the Sheikh Magician would cure him of his affliction, as he had miraculously cured himself?

And gradually it was borne in upon all men that the second Unknown had much more in common with their great Sheikh, for he too was a very remarkable magician, a marvelous shot, a mighty horseman and horsemaster, a great physician, and a man of curious and wondrous skill with his hands.

Like the great Sheikh himself, the man knew that special form of *rabah*, in which the empty hand is clenched, the thumb upon the first and second closed fingers, and a blow is delivered by shooting forward the hand in a straight line from the shoulder.

This was a very fine and terrible form of rabah; for a man may thus be smitten senseless, and apparently dead, by an unarmed smiter, or in a few minutes be beaten into a blood-stained, feeble wreck, with closed eyes scattered teeth, and bruises.

Perhaps the great Sheikh and this foundling came of the same tribe, some distant southern tribe of great skill in war, great magic, great strength, and great wisdom?

FOR a long time, El Habibka remained dumb, and when various of the *ekhwans* asked the Sheikh Magician if he would not cure him of his dumbness, the Sheikh replied that such was his hope and his intention.

And the manner in which El Habibka was restored to completest health and fullest enjoyment of all his faculties, was one of strange dramatic suddenness, for Allah suddenly gave him the gift of speech that he might save the life of his preserver!

It happened thus:

One evening, the Sheikh el Hamel el Kebir, El Habibka, the Hadji Abdul Salam and others of the *ekhwans* and chief leaders of the fighting-men had strolled beneath the palms of the oasis, after the *maghrib* prayer by the little white mosque.

Casting their eyes over the irrigation plots, green with their crops of onions, radishes, bisset, pumpkins, and barley, over the rows and piles of handbricks drying in the sun, over the groups of women at the well, in their long indigo-blue, scarlet or orange *tobhs*, over the jostling, noisy, dust-raising flocks of goats at the water-runnels and troughs, the chieftains strode *faddhling*.

Anon darkness fell, the group dissolved, savory smells of cooking being the solvent, and the Sheikh el Hamel el Kebir returned to his tent, passing one before which sat the Sitt Leila Nakhla—daughter of the late Sheikh and known as "the beautiful young palmtree"—with her young brother and two black slave girls.

The boy sprang up and ran to El Hamel, reaching up to play with his big silver-hilted dagger in its curly-ended silver sheath, and, with her soul in her eyes, the Sitt smiled upon the great and splendid man as he knelt and embraced the boy, the future Sheik, of whom he was as fond and proud as a father.

From the door of his tent El Habibka watched the scene, an enigmatic smile playing beneath his beard, and softening his hard eyes as he studied the lovely Leila.

Suddenly he shouted three words in a strange tongue and snatched at the belt of his *gandoura*, as an almost naked man bounded from the black shadow of the palms, straight at the back of the kneeling Sheikh, a long knife gleaming in his right hand.

At the sound of El Habibka's cry, the words of which he evidently understood, the Sheikh swung around, keeping his body between the assailant and the child, but not rising to his feet.

The girl sprang forward like a tigress; up flashed the keen knife of the assassin, and the Sheikh's great fist shot out and smote him terribly, below the breast-bone. As he staggered back, El Habibka's pistol banged twice, and then the Sheikh rose to his feet.

But El Habibka had spoken, a dozen people had heard, and the Sheikh had understood.

FOR the moment this portent was forgotten, as the overwrought girl threw herself upon the Sheikh's breast and entwined her arms about his neck, the boy clung to him in alarm, and men rushed up to seize the murderer.

Gently pushing the girl and child from him, the Sheikh shouted that the assassin was not to be further injured, just as El Habibka seized the wrist of Hadji Abdul Salam, as the point of that pious man's knife was entering the murderer's neck at the very spot for the neat severing of the jugular vein.

It was surprising with what force the Hadji struggled to execute justice, and with what a remarkable twist El Habibka caused him to drop his knife and yelp with pain.

It was almost as though the Hadji did not want the man to be taken alive.

It was soon seen that El Habibka's two shots had crippled and not killed, and that when the captive had recovered from the Sheikh's terrible blow he would be able to give an account of himself.

WHEN water had been thrown over the man and, tied to a palm-tree behind the Sheikh's tent, he had been

left in the excellent care of El R'Orab, the Crow, men's minds were free to turn to the more wonderful, if less exciting event of the evening, the fact that El Habibka, the Silent, the Dumb, the Afflicted of Allah, had been the object of the Mercy of Allah, and had been given speech that he might save his master.

None slept that night, and great was the *faddhling* round every fire, especially when the news spread that the assassin had at length yielded to treatment and confessed that he had been sent on his errand of death by the great Emir, Mohammed Bishari bin Mustapha Kerayim abd Rabu, at the instigation and plotting of one Suleiman the Strong, now his *wazir, wakil,* and commander-in-chief combined!

And his story was interesting, particularly those chapters of it that bore upon the professed intention of the Emir to assemble his army and make Suleiman the Strong the tributary Sheikh of the Tribe from which he had been cast forth, and to add the Tribe to the small confederation of tribes which the Emir ruled.

As he began to gain strength and hope of life, the hireling murderer grew more communicative, and under the influence of magnanimous kindness, brain-shaking exhibitions of magic, and the ever present fear of ghastly torture, became as ardently and earnestly the willing tool of the Sheikh Magician as he had been of Suleiman the Strong, and the Emir to whom Suleiman had escaped.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE CONFEDERATION

MEANWHILE, Yakoub-who-can-go-without-water and his shriveled colleagues disappeared, and none of them was seen for many days. By the time the first of them returned, much of the organizing work preparatory to another migration had been completed, and the tribe was almost ready for still one more of its many moves.

This exodus, however, was to differ from former ones, in that the tribe was going to move as an army that is accompanied by a big baggage-and-sutler train, instead of a straggling mob of men, women and children, and their flocks and herds.

It was a hard and busy time, but a spirit of cheerfulness prevailed, for variety is the spice of life, and great was the trust reposed by the tribe in their wonderful Sheikh, so full of ideas, of organizing power, and of energy, and in his trusted lieutenant, El Habibka, now Commander-in-Chief of the fighting-men.

It was felt that the Sheikh Regent would safely and surely lead the tribe to the conquest or occupation of the Great Oasis, and that he who had defeated a great Touareg *harka,* would defeat anybody who opposed their passage.

A FEW miles from the Pass of Bab-el-Haggar, Yoluba, the black Wadai slave and fighting-man, nearly seven feet high and famed for long sight among desert men famous for their long sight, sat sideways on his camel that he might watch the horizon to which all other backs were turned.

He was alone, far in the rear of the rearguard, behind which rode the Sheikh el Hamel el Kebir.

From time to time, Yoluba of the Strong Eyes would halt and turn his camel about, while he stared with unwavering gaze along the broad track made by the migrating tribe. Suddenly he whirled about, waved his long *wish'ab* stick toward his camel's head, and sent it along at its top pace, until he drew alongside the Sheikh.

"One comes," he said gutturally. "A small man on a big camel. In great haste. It will be Yakoub-who-goes-without-water."

At an order from the Sheikh, the rearguard halted, turned about, and deployed. Camels were *barraked* in line, and behind each knelt a man, his loaded rifle leveled.

It proved to be Yakoub, and with a tale of weight to tell.

"Well done, thou good and faithful servant," quoth the Sheikh on hearing it. "Ten silver *medjidies* and the best camel thou canst pick, if all go well. And so the great Emir will do even as I did unto the Touareg, and attack at the hour of camp-making, will he?"

"Ya, Sidi! But we will ring the camp about with rifles and await him. *Inshallah!*" grinned Yakoub.

"We will do better than that, Father Yakoub," replied the Sheikh, and sent three of his specially mounted messengers to El Habibka commanding the advance-guard, and to Marbruk ben Hassan and to Yussuf Latif Fetata, commanding the flank-guard, respectively.

A COUPLE of hours before sunset, the Pass of Bab-el-Haggar was silent and apparently deserted, but a quarter of a mile to the northwest of it the camels of an obviously well drilled Camel Corps were *barraked* in orderly lines, in charge of camel guards and sentries. On the distant horizon, a mighty cloud of dust indicated the passing of a vast concourse of men and beasts.

An hour before sunset, a typical Arab *harka* swept like a torrent into the wide pass, hundreds and hundreds of well-armed fighting-men on magnificent gray and white camels.

At their head rode a splendid group, one of whom bore a green silk flag on which was a crescent, and the device of the Lord of Many Tents, the Emir Mohammed Bishari bin Mustapha Korayim abd Rabu, spiritual and temporal head of a small, but growing, confederation of Bedouin tribes.

The pace of the beautiful camels of the Emir and his Sheikhs dropped from a swift mile-eating trot to a slow walk, as they reached the area of flour-like yielding dust-dunes into which even the broad feet of camels sank deeply. The setting sun shone blood-red upon flowing *burnous* and colored camel-rugs with dangling tassels. After their leaders ploughed the mass of fighting-men, brave as the lions of the desert and as undisciplined as the apes of the rocks.

"The curse of Allah on this corner of hell! It will upset my plan," growled the Emir, an impatient man, as his camel dragged one foot painfully after another through the bottomless dust.

"There is no need for haste, Lord," replied Suleiman the Strong, who rode beside him. "*Inshallah*, our ways will humbly resemble those of Allah Himself this day, for is it not written, "*Allah fleeth with wings of lead but striketh with hands of iron?*"

"This cursed pass will spoil my plans, I say," growled the Emir again.

It did.

A CURIOUS long whistling sound was heard, like a sustained note on a *quaita*, the Arab flute, and, as all eyes were raised to the rocks that bounded and formed the defile, a sudden crash of musketry followed, and the pass became a shambles.

Many flogged their camels as though that would give them wings or firm ground on which to tread. Many wheeled about, to escape by the way they had come, making confusion more confounded.

Many attempted to *barrak* their

camels and fire from behind them at the well-concealed enemy, only to find that their unprotected backs were turned to another foe.

"Kismet," groaned the Emir, putting his hand to his bleeding chest. *"El Mektub Mektub,"* and fell from his camel.

The man to whom he spoke, one Suleiman the Strong, brought his camel to its knees and then lay flat, close beside it, feigning death.

Wild discharging of rifles by fully exposed men, replied but for a brief space to steady, careful short-range shooting by men lying, with resting rifles, behind rocks.

The inevitable end came quickly, and the Sheikh el Hamel el Kebir was prompt to save life.

To the surprise of the vanquished, not a throat was cut, and to each wounded man the same help was given that would have been rendered by his son.

But the defeat was utter, bitter and irretrievable, for not a rifle, a round of ammunition, nor a camel remained to the leaderless army of the confederation of tribes, lately strong and arrogant in the strong hand of the Emir Mohammed Bishari.

WELL acquainted with the truth of *vae victis,* it did not take the Sheikhs of the prisoners long to accept the small change of plan whereby the confederated tribes became attached to the tribe, instead of the decimated tribe being attached to the confederated tribes.

Nor did they see any loss in exchanging the leadership and rule of the Emir Mohammed for that of the Emir el Hamel el Kebir who had conquered him in war.

So the tribal sheikhs gave hostages of their sons and daughters and of their flocks and herds and treasures, and the Sheikh el Hamel el Kebir became the Emir el Hamel el Kebir, the Victorious and Blessed of Allah the Merciful, the Compassionate.

His days now being filled with labors of military and civil organization, the new Emir appointed El Habibka to be Sheikh Regent of the tribe, and brought joy upon the *ekhwan* and fighting-men by promising that he would himself dwell with the tribe and none other.

At a great *diffa* given in the new Emir's honor by aged Dawad Fetata, the Sitt Leila Nakhla delighted to honor him by waiting on him herself.

The Emir was conscious of the honor, but not of the fact that the girl pressed to her own lips and breast the bowl from which he drank, and let none but herself touch it in future.

AND, as unto him that hath shall be given, more and more power was given to the Emir el Hamel el Kebir, as more and more Sheikhs sought his protection and countenance, and his Confederation waxed like Jonah's gourd, until its fame spread abroad in all the land, north, south, east and west.

In the north and west it attracted the deeply interested attention of certain Great Ones.

CHAPTER XXV

THE EMMISSARY

IT WAS the prudent custom of the Emir el Hamel el Kebir and his Wazir, the Sheikh el Habibka, to sit apart from all men, that they might converse on high matters of state in the completest privacy.

This they did upon a rug-strewn carpet, above which a roof-canopy of felt was supported by four poles.

At the corners of an imaginary square, four Sudanese sentries, each a hundred yards from the other and from their Lord, watched that no man approached without invitation.

Thus, seated one evening there came to them the Emir's faithful body-servant, R'Orab the Crow, escorting the aged but tough and enduring chief of the scouts who formed the intelligence department of the Emir.

The two men prostrated themselves, salaaming reverently.

"Speak," said the Emir.

"Lord, thy servant, Yacoub-who-goes-without-water hath news for thine ear," announced El R'Orab.

"Speak," said the Emir to the ancient.

"Lord, a small caravan comes. Its leaders are strange ones. One is an Egyptian or an Arab from Egypt. He is of the great Zaonia of Cairo. The other speaks and dresses as the Bedouin, but his ways are strange. The two speak together in a strange tongue. They seized me and made me their guide," the old man grinned toothlessly, "and I slept against the wall of their tent for warmth and shelter from the wind, but their talk was in a strange tongue.

"They have much money and their servants are faithful. Their hired camel-men could not tell me much. They were engaged at Siwah and have come by way of Holy Kufra. They think it possible that the chief leader is a *Roumi*, but he carries papers that great Sheikhs kiss and place against their foreheads and their hearts. It is said that much honor was shown them at Siwa and also at Holy Kufra by the Lord of the Senussi. I left them at the last water-hole, escaping by night upon my fast camel.

THREE days later two bearded strangers sat and talked long and eloquently with the Emir el Hamel el Kebir and his Wazir.

Most of the talking was done by a curious hybrid product of modern civilization who had been a student of the great El Kazar College at Cairo and of the Paris Sorbonne as well. He had been an employee of the *Bureau Arabe* and had sojourned in Algiers. He had resigned his post and visited Constantinople, departing thence for Jerusalem.

The wanderlust or some other lust had then taken him to Europe once more. All that he said was confirmed in terse speech by his master, a man whom the Emir and Wazir studied more carefully than they did the voluble cosmopolitan Arab-Egyptian.

And what he said was of deep interest, a thrilling and intriguing story.

HE told these simple desert chieftains of a great *Roumi* King of Kings, one clad in shining armor, who had long since been moved by Allah in a dream, to see the error of his ways and to embrace the True Faith. So great was he that the very Father of the Faithful himself had called him Brother and had invited him to Stamboul that he might embrace him. So great was he that, once upon a time, the very walls of the Holy City of Jerusalem were thrown down that he might enter, when he went there on pilgrimage, using no common gate trodden by the feet of common men.

The simple desert chieftains, much impressed, were too deeply enthralled to talk, until the Emir, stroking his beard, sought enlightenment as to what all this had to do with him.

He received it.

Stirred by the knowledge that there is no God but God, and that Mahomet is his Prophet, and shocked by the sight of Islam groaning in bondage, yea, beneath the heel of the *Franzawi Roumi* here in Africa, this mighty King of Kings was about to urge his Brother, the Father of the Faithful, in Stamboul, to preach a *Jehad*, a Holy War, for the overthrow of all oppressors of Islam, throughout the world, and especially in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia Egypt and the countries adjacent.

And to all great Chieftains, Emirs, Sheikhs and leaders of Tribal Confederations, he was sending word to be prepared for the Great Day of Islam, the day of the creation of the Pan-Islamic State in Africa and the utter overthrow and extermination of the *Roumi*.

Already the greatest Islamic power in Africa, the Senussi, were pledged to obey orders from Stamboul, and it was hoped and believed that the Emir el Hamel el Kebir would attack the French when the Senussi attacked the English in Egypt. Meanwhile, gifts, arms, money, promises. . . .

THIS first audience being concluded, and orders having been given for the pitching of a camp for the strangers' caravan, the Emir el Hamel el Kebir and the Sheikh el Habibka el Wazir stared long and thoughtfully into each other's faces.

"D'you place him, Bud?" asked the Emir.

"Search me," replied the Wazir, "but I certainly 've seen him before. He's got me guessing. There's a catch in it somewhere."

The Emir smiled.

"He's going to be a whole heap uneasier than you are, Buddy." He paused. "Remember a sure-enough real bad man, way back at Tokotu when we were in the Legion? Came to us at Douargala with a draft from Saida. The boys allowed it was him and him alone, started that big mutiny there, though it was never brought home to him. Same game at Tokotu. Always had plenty of money and spent it on gettin' popular. Reg'lar professional mutineer and trouble-brewer, and a real brave man. Get him?"

"Nope."

"He had been in the French Cavalry, he said, and got jailed for mutinying there, too, and then he joined the Legion to carry on the good work. He was on that march with us from Tokotu to Zinderneuf, the place where those two bright boys burnt out and killed old Lejaune, and Old Man Bojolly put this guy under arrest for refusing to obey orders. He tried to work up a mutiny again that time, and he very nearly . . ."

"*Rastignac!*" cried the Wazir and smote his thigh. "*Rastignac the Mutineer!* That's the guy! I knew I knew him the moment I set eyes on him. Had too many drinks out of the old thing not to know him. Used to wear a pointed beard and big mustache waxed up like you would stick corks on the ends for safety."

"You said it, Bud. It's Old Man Rastignac. And what in hell is the stiff doing in this outfit, I want to know."

"Earnin' some dirty money again, I s'pose. From the same purse, too, I guess. What'll we do with him, Hank?"

"Teach him poker, son, and get all he's got. Think he recognized us any?"

"Not on your life. I watched him mighty careful. We were clean shaven those days, and he wore a beard. That's why we seemed to know him and he didn't know us.

You look more like an old goat in a bush than a soldier, behind that flowin' doormat of whiskers."

The two simple desert chieftains eyed each other critically, their strong faces impassive, sardonic, hard, their eyes enigmatic inscrutable, faintly humorous perhaps.

Sending for one Yussuf Latif Fetata, grandson of the High Sheikh Sidi Dawad Fetata, the Emir bade him bivouac a company of the Camel Corps beside the camp of the strangers, for their honor and protection, and to protect them so effectually that not a man of the caravan left their camp by day or by night.

Their camels were to be "minded" for them in the *fondouk*, their rifles were to be taken from them to be cleaned and also "minded," and daily they were to receive ample rations and water for that day alone. No man could leave the Great Oasis without swift camels and a good supply of food and water.

"On my head and my life be it, Sidi," salaamed young Yussuf Latif Fetata and departed to see that the honored guests were also honored and strictly guarded prisoners.

BUT though they could not leave this spacious and comfortable camp, others could enter it, others, that is to say, who had authorized business there, and no one dreamed of hindering that wise and pious priest, Hadji Abdul Salam, chief man and spiritual head of his tribe from paying a ceremonial visit of honor to the Emir's honored guests.

He paid many visits, in fact, which were not ceremonial and in the course of which this prophet, who was not without honor in his own country, showed that honor might not be without profit, also.

When a certain soldier, one Gharibeel Zarrug (a young man who feared and reverenced the Hadji, and whom the tongue of malice declared to be the Hadji's son), was on sentry over the tents of the leaders of the expedition, the pious Hadji visited them by night, and much curious and interesting conversation ensued.

After one such heart-to-heart talk, and the departure of Hadji Abdul Salam, the Egyptian Arab, who affected patent leather dancing pumps, silk socks, scent, hair-pomade and other European vices, and who yearned exceedingly for a high stiff collar, frock-coat, *tarbush* and the pavements of Paris, observed to his colleague or employer:

"Might do worse. He'd be ours, body and soul, both for the money and because we should know too much. If he killed the Emir and his jackal, or had them killed, he would be the power behind the throne, until he was the throne itself."

"Yes. Might do much worse," agreed the other man. "He would be Regent for this boy that the Emir is nursing, until the time came for the boy to die. I don't like this Emir. He says too little and stares too much. He's a strong ruler, and no tool for anybody. And it's a tool we want here."

"No, I don't like him either," agreed the other, "and he doesn't like us or our proposals, I fancy. I have an idea that the French were here before us. Do you think we are in any danger?"

"*Great* danger, I should say," rejoined the leader and smiled mockingly at his companion, whose invaluable gifts he knew to be rather those of the fox than of the lion.

"Then we must get down to real business with the Hadji the next time he comes," was the reply of the Egyptian-Arab. "We shall have been well-deserved of our masters if we do nothing more here than re-

move the Emir, a political enemy of great importance."

"We shall do more than that," prophesied the other.

CHAPTER XXVI

VOICES FROM THE PAST

A FEW days later, in pride, peace, prosperity and patience, the Emir el Hamel el Kebir sat upon the rugs and cushions of the carpet of his pavilion, splendidly arrayed, exhaling dignity, benevolence and lordship.

Beside him sat his almost equally resplendent Vizier, known to all men as the Sheikh el Habibka el Wazir.

Between their bearded lips were the mouth-pieces of their long-stemmed *narghilehs,* from which they inhaled deep draughts of soothing smoke.

A man came running, halted, and prostrated himself.

"Speak, O El R'Orab, the Crow," murmured the Emir.

"Lord," said the man, "the leader Marbruk ben Hassan has returned, with none missing. He brings three prisoners, two of them women. The man prisoner says he comes to the Emir with messages from the rulers of his tribe."

"Go to the Hadji Abdul Salam and say that the Emir bids him receive these people and offer them hospitality for three days in the guest tents. When they are rested and refreshed, let him bring the man before me. I have spoken."

The Emir and the Vizier sat in silence, their eyes resting on the pleasant view before them, a scene beautified by feathery palms, green grass and running water, on which rested the benediction of the setting sun.

Anon men approached, in the midst of whom walked a French officer in full uniform.

The Vizier's elbow pressed that of the Emir.

"My Sunday pants!" murmured the Vizier. *"It's Old Man Bojolly!* Run us down at last!"

"Game's up, Bud," murmured the Emir. "This is where we get what's coming to us."

And with severe dignity, and calm faces of perhaps more than Oriental inscrutability, they received Major Henri de Beaujolais, in open *mejliss* or durbar.

AFTER the return of the Major to the guest tent, the Emir and the Vizier sat cross-legged upon their cushions and gazed each upon the face of the other.

"Well, Hank Sheikh, and what do you know about *that?"* observed the Vizier to his lord.

"Our name's mud," replied the Emir. Old Man Boje and his *"great and peaceful message!"* "It'll be more great than peaceful when his troops arrive."

"They say they always get you, in the end," reflected the Vizier. "I wonder what force he's brought and where he's left it."

"That's what's puzzling me, Bud. I allow no desert-column, nor camel corps, nor squadron of Spahis, nor company of the Legion could have got within three days of here without us knowing it."

"Sure thing. If a gang of Touareg Bohunks couldn't, French troops couldn't. I s'pose it is us he's after?"

"Who else? It certainly isn't this Rastignac person. Anyhow, we'll play Sheikhs till the boiler bursts, and 'see him and raise him' every time, Bud."

"You've said it, Hank. We got better poker faces than Ole Man Bojolly, I allow. But what'll we

do if he gets up in *mejliss* and says:

"'I rise to remark I've come to fetch you two hoboes out of this for deserters from the Foreign Legion on reconnaissance duty in the face of the enemy and the Lord have mercy on your sinful souls, amen, and you better come quiet or I'll stretch you and call up my desert column. What'll we do then, Hank Sheikh?"

"Bluff him out and say he's got a touch of the sun and ought to turn teetotal. Or else tie him up in a neat parcel and run him into Egypt. That's British territory. Sit on the walls of Jerusalem and sing *Yankee Doodle* to him. Jerusalem *is* in the land of Egypt, isn't it, Bud?"

"Yep. House of Bondage an' all that, but we needn't vamoose any. We can turn the Injuns loose on him if he starts handing out the rough stuff and is all for marchin' us to the calaboose in Zaguig or somewhere; or we can let his old friend Rastignac get him."

"No, sir. We don't turn Injuns on a lone white man, and we don't set the Injuns up against Christian machine-guns nor civilized artillery, either. Not after they elected us to Congress like this, and made me President and all. . . . Put their last dollar on us for Clean Politics and the People's Party, Monroe Doctrine and No Foreign Entanglements. . . . No, I guess we've got to hit the high places again, and hike. But I'll laugh some if he gets Rastignac, too!"

"And after us living so respectable, too!" the Vizier groaned.

"It surely would jar you, Buddy," the Emir agreed.

"Some tracking Ole Man Bojolly's done! He's a cute cuss, and the fierce go-getter. He's got a nerve, too, to ride straight in here like a Texas Ranger into a Mexican village, and I hand it to him and no ill-will." Then the Vizier groaned again. "And me just thinking of marrying and settling down and all!"

THAT evening, after the feast and the departure of their guests—the major and his lady friends—the Emir and the Vizier observed a long silence, each apparently respecting the feelings of the other. At length the Vizier found words.

"Can you beat it? Do I sleep? Do I dream and is Visions about? I believe I've been talking to an honest-to-God genuine, sure-enough American Girl, and held her hand in mine."

"I'm dazed and weak, Bud," murmured the Emir, "but I testify you certainly held her hand in yours. I thought it *was* yours."

"It's goin' to be!" pronounced the Vizier, with a fervor of resolution. "It's goin' to be," he repeated. If I don't marry that girl I'll hand in my checks and wilt to the bone-orchard."

The Emir emitted a rumble of sarcastic laughter.

"Huh! And yesterday you were going to marry four Arab females and settle down respectable!"

"That ain't love, you old fool! Not by a jugful." Then as an afterthought and shrewdly: "Say, Hank, old son, you're not goin' to fall in love with that lil' lovely peach yourself?"

"No, Bud, I am not. But I'll rise to remark that Old Man Bojolly *is* . . . Yep. Sure thing! He's fallen for that little lady all right."

The Vizier closed a useful looking fist and shook it above his head.

"*What!*" he ejaculated in a whispering shout. "He'd come here to arrest us and get us shot, *and* he'd steal our girls from under our very noses, too! He *would*? I allow that's torn it! Old Man Bojolly better git up an' git . . . Let's ride him outa town and tell him to go while the goin's good!" The Emir did not comment upon this suggestion, so the

Vizier added: "I'm goin' to propose to that sweet and lovely American Girl, and lay my heart and life and fortune at her feet."

"You haven't got a fortune," suggested the Emir patiently.

"I'll darn soon rustle a fortune if she'll have me."

"*That's* the spirit, son! And I'll back you up. You court her gentle and lovin' an' respectful an' I'll give you a character. Time you had one too. But we sure got to tell her all about ourselves, Bud. All the truth about us, so there's no deception like . . ."

"Sure. I wouldn't deceive her, not for anything."

"I'll mention about those four Arab Janes—just to show you got the serious marryin' mind, and prob'ly been collectin' the sticks o' furniture for the Home."

The Vizier snorted in disgust. "And I've got to talk this Arabic gargle while Ole Boje gets away with his stuff in English, and French, and American too! How am I going to tell her what I think of her in—Arabic!"

"You got away with it in Agades, son. You remember *that* one, don't you? You was *dumb* then, too."

"This is different. This is a girl what's real folks. You don't know what *love* is, you ugly low-life old moron. The laughter of fools is as the cackling of prawns in a pot. You never been in love, I tell you!"

"Me! Love? No. Sure. What you know about Miss Maudie Atkinson, Bud?"

"Some girl, if Miss Mary Vanbrugh wasn't there. And not bad fer British. Yep, I'd surely have fallen for her, if the American girl hadn't been there."

"You certainly would, Bud—Thou Fragrance of the Pit—— Say, I got an idea," suddenly continued the Emir. "S'pose we could tell Miss Vanbrugh all about us and say we trust her not to tell Ole Boje until he springs it on us himself? I've got a hunch he isn't after us, and doesn't recognize us, either.

"If I'm wrong, he's got the best bluff and the best poker face on any man I met yet, and we're innocent children beside him. Him and his *'great and peaceful message!' I* don't b'lieve the old fox is on to *us* at all."

"Then what is he here for, son?" asked the Vizier.

"Ask me something easier," the Emir returned expressively, and drained a glass of lemon-water without enthusiasm.

Silence fell. The Emir and the Vizier sank deep into thought. From time to time the solemn face of each was lightened by a reminiscent smile. Then the Emir said abruptly:

"Women are funny things, Bud. They've got a sort of second-sight and sixth sense, worth all your cleverness, son. It's what they call——"

"Instinct?" suggested the Vizier.

"Yup, an' somthing else—— Intuition. That's it. An' I've got a hunch Miss Mary Vanbrugh saw clean through us—and out the other side!"

"Think she's put Bojolly wise—if he wasn't already?"

"No, no—I think not. I allow she'd watch and wait. If we weren't planning any harm to Boje, she'd plan no harm to us. But I may be wrong. I usually am."

"Sure, son," agreed the Vizier.

"I've got to get Miss Vanbrugh alone tomorrow," mused the Emir.

"Me, too. *Some,*" murmured the Vizier.

(To be concluded.)

Finding the Right Angle

By ELLIOT BALESTIER

TO CLARK MEARS, Harvey's suggestion would have come as manna in a desert. That it did not, proved how really alarming his condition was. He was sick, bored, disillusioned and—unemployed. Sick because, after years of strenuous physical activity, he had suddenly adopted the athletic standards of the oyster; bored because he had nothing to do, and disillusioned because the current "One Girl" by name Elinor James, had refused to take him at his own valuation. The unemployment was largely the result of the other three conditions combined.

It was over the table of an obscure cellar restaurant, whither Clark had been lured by the mildly Bohemian Harvey, that the latter sprang his somewhat curious story. Mears listened, at first indifferently and from pure inertia; later with reluctantly awakened interest.

He drew a long breath when Harvey finished the preliminary outline of the matter and in spite of himself some of the despondent droop left his rather wide efficient-looking shoulders.

"Dick," he remarked plaintively, "I presume you are putting this proposition to me in a spirit of mercy, but it doesn't register. The quality of mercy as described by the only original legal flapper, Miss Portia, is *not* strained, but your weird yarn certainly *is*. Nevertheless, I recognize that it is intended to drop on me as a gentle dew from heaven; also the fact that you are a sympathetic and would-be helpful frined, and I am duly grateful."

"You'll find sympathy in the well-known dictionary and help at any employment agency," returned Harvey tartly. "This is a straight business proposition, feller, and is made for *my* material advantage and my little sister's peace of mind, *not* for the benefit of your health nor the good of your so-called soul."

"Right-o!" grinned Clark. "After all, the motive is not important if you are really stating serious facts, so let's get down to cases. I probably won't take the matter up for you, but I might be able to help with some of my well-known keenly brilliant suggestions."

Harvey drew an envelope from his pocket and tossed it across the table. It was addressed in a slightly immature feminine hand that gave promise of becoming strongly characteristic in later years.

"Sis was fashionably 'finished,' " he observed. "They usually go in for illegible writing—to conceal eccen-

tricities of spelling, I suppose—but Billie seems to have avoided both accomplishments. This particular letter is a trifle incoherent, naturally, but you can read it without undue anguish."

Clark found he could. It read:

Sidneyville, Vt., June 25th, 1925.

DEAR DICK: You must come home at once. Something terrible has happened. I don't know just *what*, but it is *terrible*, and I am frightened. Mother says it was a dream, but I know it wasn't. One doesn't dream a whole conversation while cutting roses in the garden at eleven o'clock of a beautiful June morning. And besides, there are the marks where the horse pawed the gravel. I know she was there—I can't tell you who because she said her presence was a secret. I mean I can't tell in a letter that might fall into other hands. I saw her ride up the drive on a new horse and she stopped and spoke to me and rode on to the stable, dismounted and led the horse inside. When I got there less than two minutes later there was nobody there—nothing. She and the horse had both disappeared. That was this morning, and I have searched everywhere but not a sign of them except the pawed place in the gravel, and George has raked that over now. Oh, Dick! I know this is frightfully mixed up, but I am really horribly frightened, and mother only laughs at me. Please come if only to convince me I'm not going crazy.

Your loving sister,

BILLIE.

P. S.—I rode over to her house here and the housekeeper told me she wasn't there and wasn't expected until next week.

Clark read the letter a second time before he looked up.

"Is Miss Billie given to dreams or visions?" he asked. "I don't think I've met her."

"She is *not*," replied Harvey with decision. "On the contrary, she is usually a most matter-of-fact and business-like young person of the efficient modern type. Neither is she excitable nor easily frightened. Furthermore, having a shrewd idea who the disappearee is from some of Billie's references, I took the trouble to call up her apartment in town. I was informed that she had left the city three days ago. You probably noted Billie's 'P. S.'"

Clark nodded. "It certainly looks odd," he said musingly. "You say there is only the one entrance to the stable?"

"Only the one, and that directly opposite the rose garden where Billie was. Also there is no possible way of getting out of the grounds from the stable except by the drive within fifty feet of where Sis was."

"I see," said Clark. "And your idea is for me to go to Sidneyville as a sort of detective *de luxe* and solve the mystery, since you can't leave your vast financial interests without danger of a cataclysm. Well, it sounds interesting and if I felt a little more fit I might."

"You'll feel a lot less fit if you let yourself slump like a molusk in a slough of despondency much longer," snapped Harvey. "Just because a clever girl jacks you off your pedestal and jars some of the self-generated conceit out of you, you crawl off into a hole like a ——"

"I have no interest whatever in any woman," interrupted Clark coldly. "It is merely that the futility of life in general——"

"And yours in particular," cut in Harvey. "I get you, bo'. 'Oh, that this too, too solid flesh would melt,' 'weary, stale, flat and unprofitable seem to you all the uses, etc.' Go on! Finish it up, my Noble Dane. There's something rotten in Manhattan besides the cherry. But it may intrigue your flagging interest in existence to know the name of the subject of this mystery."

"I do not see just what bearing it would have on my interest in the matter," returned Clark disdainfully. "Frankly, I haven't any, though I have tried to listen to your wild tale courteously. But obviously your

mother is right, and your sister just dozed off in the garden and dreamed it all."

"Well, I'm going to tell you anyway," snapped Harvey. "There is only one girl who rides horseback, has a place near ours in Vermont, usually goes there the last of June, and who isn't at her apartment on the Drive now. And you know her."

Mears became upright in his chair as suddenly as though one of the foreign-looking diners in the place had exploded a bomb.

"Elinor!" he gasped.

"Precisely," returned Harvey dryly. "My clever and efficient cousin Nell James. But of course, as you say, it is unimportant. Probably only a delusion of Billie's or——"

"Elinor!" repeated Mears rising. "It is she who has disappeared? Good God! And you have been making a joke of it—and wasting time!"

"So have you," replied Harvey. "Besides—say, hold on, where are you going?"

"I'm going to Sidneyville by the first train I can get," snapped Clark grimly. "Come on and fix me up a letter of introduction to your mother and sister. We've wasted time enough. Elinor! Good God!"

A VILLAGE taxi, minus a meter but whose tariff proved it a guild brother of the New York species, deposited Clark Mears at the door of the Harvey place shortly before noon the next day.

Evidently news of the disappearance was not public, as Clark learned by judiciously quizzing the loquacious and inquisitive driver during the five-mile ride from the village. But he received much detailed information about the neighbors, especially the summer colony, and caught a fleeting glimpse of the James homestead standing back from the road in a grove of pines, about halfway between the village and his destination.

Turning into the drive of "Beechwood," the Harvey place, he saw at once that Dick was right. No one, that is, no one accompanied by a horse, could leave the place from the stable without passing within a few feet of a person in the rose garden.

Mrs. Harvey received him kindly, though she scoffed openly at his mission.

But Clark was far from being reassured by his attitude, especially after he had met Billie, an attractive, extremely pretty girl of eighteen, with no faintest trace of neurosis or hysteria. In fact, she struck him as an unusually healthy, wholesome, competent and matter-of-fact young woman with her full share of practical common sense. The last person in the world to be given to seeing things, or inventing them.

IT was not until after luncheon that he had an opportunity to talk freely with her. Then, at his request, they adjourned, after an inspection of the house and out-buildings, to the rose garden. There, seated on a bench near the spot where Bilile had had her interview with Elinor, Clark took paper and pencil from his pocket and sketched roughly a ground plan of the buildings and their immediate surroundings.

"There," he said when, aided by Billie's suggestion, the plan was finished. "Now let's see what we can make of things. First just where were you when you first saw Elinor?"

"On the path right near the drive," replied the girl, pointing out the spot on the diagram, and Clark marked it with the letter "A."

"Good," he said. "Now Elinor came in the gate, rode up the drive on the right side of the grass-plot, turned the corner by the rose garden and stopped opposite you. Is that right? Very

well, then, we'll indicate her progress with dots and mark the place she stopped with a 'B.' Now tell me as nearly as possible exactly what was said, and what happened."

"Well," began Billie slowly, "it was just about eleven o'clock and I was cutting some of those early June roses, right there, for the table. I heard hoof-beats and looked around just as Nell was turning the corner of the rose garden. She was on horseback—a new horse, I noticed—and she stopped just opposite me at the spot you have marked 'B,' smiled and said, 'Hello, Billie, who else is home?' "

"Did she look all right?" asked Clark. "I mean, did you notice if she appeared worried or upset or—or anything?"

"No, she looked quite as usual," returned Billie. "She is always rather serious, you know. I was so surprised to see her a week ahead of time that I said—well, I guess I just whooped it: 'For goodness sake, Nell, where did you come from?"

"She put her finger to her lips warningly and said: 'Ssh! I don't want anyone to know I'm here if I can help it. It's very important. Who's home?'

"Yates, he's our combination coachman and chauffeur, had d r i v e n mother to town and she had taken Bessie, the second girl, along. George, the gardener and his assistant were working in the vegetable garden over the hill. Only May, the cook, and I were home.

I explained this and told her that we would have to put up the horse ourselves, and asked her where she got him.

"She kind of smiled and said: 'He's part of the secret. Isn't he a beauty?'

"The horse was restive, shaking his head and pawing the gravel, but she curbed him and added, as if relieved: 'I'm glad only you and Mary are home, Billie. It is tremendously important it doesn't become generally known I am here. Please don't mention it to anyone, no matter what happens,' and then she repeated it with emphasis: 'No matter what happens.'

"I was surprised, but I thought if she didn't want to be seen she should not be there in full view of the road, so I told her to go along to the stable and I would be with her in a minute, and she went."

"*Into* it?" asked Clark.

"Yes," replied Billie thoughtfully, trying to recall the exact circumstances. "She trotted up to the doors, keeping to the right of the grass-plot, and dismounted." (Clark followed her course on the plan and marked the spot with a "C") "Then she pushed back one of the doors—they were already open about a foot—and led the horse in. I heard the clatter of his hoofs on the floor."

"And then?"

"Then I stopped to cut two more roses I had had my eye on, picked up my basket, and went straight over to the corner of the porch where I left it. Yes, that's right (as Clark marked the spot with a 'D').

"Then I walked along the drive on the left side of the grass-plot to the stable doors, pushed the right one open as Nell had——"

"Wait a minute," interrupted Clark. "You didn't say she had shut them again after leading the horse in."

"I didn't notice that she had until I turned toward them from the porch. The right one was wide open when I turned to cut the last two roses. When I noticed them after putting the basket on the porch they were as they had been all the morning, open about a foot."

"Exactly how long was it," asked Mears, "between the time Elinor led the horse into the stable and the time you reached there?"

"Not over a minute, a minute and a

half at most," replied Billie. "And my back was toward the stable less than half that time."

Clark took out his watch. "Hum!" he said. "A minute is quite a long time when you are counting the seconds on a watch. When you are busy at something else it isn't so long. Suppose you go through the motions again while I time it."

Billie did so, stooping as if to cut the roses, dropping them and the shears into the basket, and then walking to the porch and from there to the stable doors. Clark snapped the watch into his pocket as he reached her.

"Two minutes and thirty-eight seconds," he said, smiling, when she rejoined him. "I thought you had cut it pretty fine, for it is at least seventy-five feet from here to the porch and almost twice that to the stable door. Time is deceptive. But even so I don't see any light; unless the horse was equipped with helicopter, or she jumped him over one of the buildings, I can't see where she went. Of course, in point of time a minute or two *might* be enough for her to lead the horse out, close the door, mount and get by you, but it is inconceivable that you shouldn't have *heard* them."

"Utterly impossible," declared Billie decidedly. "She'd have had to pass within fifty feet of me and on the gravel that not even a dog could walk noiselessly."

"Well," said Clark gloomily, "we seem to have arrived at the same point we started from, so far as I can see. Elinor led the horse into the stable and pulled the door. Two minutes and a half later you arrive and they have both vanished into thin air. What happened to Elinor and the horse in those hundred and fifty seconds?"

BILLIE said nothing. She had been engaged upon the puzzle for three days and nights and was almost hopeless. Clark studied his plan and Billie's profile.

"By the way," he asked, "there are two windows in the kitchen overlooking the drive and the stable doors. Why didn't Mary see Elinor?"

"She was out in the yard on the other side hanging some clothes on the line. She was still there when I went through the woodshed after searching the stable and into the kitchen."

"Couldn't Elinor have done that?" asked Clark eagerly. "Gone through the house and out the front door while you were walking to the stable?"

"Nell could, of course," replied Billie dryly. "But how about leading a fourteen-hand steel-shod horse up three steps and through a very low and narrow door to the woodshed; up three more steps and another narrow door to the kitchen; across twenty feet of linoleum, and through two rooms and a hall with polished parquet floors that even a boot-heel marks; then through two not very wide screen doors and down seven steps, and all without leaving a mark or making a sound that I could have heard through the open windows."

"I guess we can cancel that possibility," said Clark ruefully. "And the windows of the stable, harness-room and carriage house are all barred, besides being far too small for a horse to get through. The carriage house door, by George——"

"The carriage house door was locked on the outside by a padlock," interrupted Billie. "I see what you mean, but she couldn't have got out that way.

Clark's face fell.

"And the garage is shut off by a solid fire-wall with no door at all," he said hopelessly.

For a few moments they sat looking at each other helplessly but, on Clark's part at least, there was a rapidly growing appreciation of the at-

tractions of his companion. In fact, though he did not in the least realize it, his interest in the case was undergoing a subtle change. While on his arrival the personal element had wholly eclipsed any other, he now began to see that besides this it might have some interest as an abstract problem.

"Mary has a theory," said Billy at last hesitantly.

"Does *she* know about it?" asked Clark.

"Naturally. When I went into the kitchen from the stable, I asked her if Elinor had gone that way. So she had to know all about it. But she's all right. She's been with us since before I was born."

"What's *her* theory?" asked Clark.

"I don't suppose it should bear enough weight to be repeated," said Billie. "It's a little more absurd than any of the dozens I have been able to evolve, but I don't think we should neglect anything. She says I saw a ghost!"

"Good Lord!" laughed Clark. Then as the full significance of the implication reached him he sobered. "You mean she suggests that Elinor is dead, and that what you saw was a subconscious vision, a psychic suggestion?"

"I suppose that is the way Freud or Flammarion would put it," replied Billie. "Mary's idea is that it was just a plain, old-fashioned ghost. And it is the more plausible of the two. One can't psychically suggest a horse that will paw up two or three feet of good gravel drive."

"I suppose that is so," admitted Clark. "Nothing seems to get us anywhere, does it? Suppose we go and give the stable another thorough search."

Billie rose and, rather hopelessly they sauntered to the stable.

Billie led the way and pushed back one of the large doors while Clark slid open the other. As an example of a well-kept stable, it was a model, but as the scene of a mysterious disappearance it was hopelessly normal and bare of clues.

A LONE bay mare, covered with a light summer blanket, occupied one of the six stalls. The other five and the loose-box were empty.

"We sold most of the horses when father died," Billie volunteered. "He always had a stable full. He hated motors. But we only kept his old driving pair and a couple of saddle horses for Dick and me. That's my mare, Phyllis, there. Dick's Roderick, and father's old roans are out in the home pasture back of the stable. Yates always turns them out unless he has time to spare to exercise them. The work horses, of course, are kept at the farm."

Clark looked at the sturdy little mare appreciatively.

"Pity she can't talk," he observed. "She might tell us something."

"So might Roderick," returned Billie. " He was in that day."

"Well, we won't bore him with questions," returned Clark, smiling gloomily. "What's upstairs?"

"Nothing," answered Billie. "It just an empty loft. Shall we go up?"

"Might as well," agreed Clark without enthusiasm. "It's the only place I haven't seen."

One end of it was, as Billie had said, empty, but the other end was filled with hay. Clark looked from it to Billie quizzically. "I thought you said there was *nothing* here," he said.

Billie stared at him in surprise. "Why, there *isn't*," she replied, "at least nothing but hay, of course. What of that?"

Clark grinned. "Probably nothing," he returned, "only it illustrates a point; that the usual, the *expected*, often escapes our observation. And

sometimes they are the vital things that would clear up everything."

He followed her up the steep stairs to the loft and glanced about.

A small window at either end, cobwebbed and dusty, let in a faint light. Billie, moving with the assurance of familiarity, left Clark's side and presently a large square door at the back swung open, letting in a flood of the afternoon sunshine.

"This is where the hay is taken in," she explained. "The wagon drives up underneath and it is pitchforked in. There are the roans and Dick's Rod."

Clark looked out. A space of three or four acres had been fenced off from the surrounding fields and meadows and served as the "home pasture" Billie had mentioned. The three horses, their noses together, drowsed contentedly under an apple tree. Beyond the pasture, and the cornfield that adjoined it, the ground rose to a wooded hill, above and behind which rose the bald, rounded top of another and much higher hill.

"The farm buildings are over there to the north of us about a mile to the left," Billie explained. You can't see them on account of the rise and the trees. That's our sugar tree to the west, directly in front of us, and that round top sticking up behind it is Prospect Hill. There's a gorgious view from there. You can see—Oh!"

"She stopped suddenly with a gasp of astonishment, seizing Clark's arm and clinging to it desperately.

"Look!" she whispered. "Oh look!"

Mears needed no urging. He was staring with all his might, for there at the apex of the rounded top of the hill, clear-cut as a silhouette against the clear blue background of the cloudless sky, a mounted figure had suddenly appeared. A figure unmistakable even at that distance. A woman on horseback—Elinor.

For a moment horse and rider remained posed still as a statue, apparently looking down upon them. Then, as suddenly as it had appeared it vanished; went out, it seemed to their excited imagination, as a snuffed candle flame.

CLARK became suddenly conscious that not only was Billie clinging to him but that he was wholeheartedly assisting the process with both arms. He dropped the latter hastily and Billie drew away.

"You saw?" she whispered.

"Yes," he replied. "I'd swear it was Elinor."

"And the horse, too," said Billie. "I couldn't mistake that head."

"We must get up there at once," cried Clark eagerly. "You saddle your horse and I'll catch Dick's."

"No," amended Billie as they ran down the stairs. "He wouln't let you catch him. We'll take Phyllis and the saddles and we'll both go to the pasture for Rod."

Five minutes later they cantered rapidly across the meadow, skirted the cornfield and turned into the steep, narrow road that led over the maple-covered hill; up and over and down a gentle decline to a brook and another meadow, and then the long steep climb up Prospect Hill, bare pasture land, rocky and arid.

The distance had not been very great, not over a mile and a half from the house to the summit of the hill, but the road was not adapted to speed and a full half-minute had elapsed from the time they had seen the mounted figure until they reached the spot where it had seemed to stand.

Clark dismounted and searched the crest of the hill, a long, narrow plateau, dropping away rapidly on the further side and sparsely covered with blackberry bushes and scrub pines. The surface was largely bare

rock, and the ground between the outcroppings was nearly as hard. Not a hoof-print showed anywhere in the vicinity of the rock crest, though beyond it, where the ground was softer and covered with coarse grass, were many tracks of both cattle and horses.

"Not much to be gained here," observed Clark disappointedly. "One would only have to follow the line of this rock outcropping, the easiest way down, to reach the woods in the valley, without leaving a track."

He mounted and for a few minutes they sat silently studying the surrounding country. North, south, east and west they could see for miles over the rugged, rolling surface of the Green Mountain State—a storm-tossed sea suddenly congealed; a sea of fresh, vivid emerald, darkened occasionally with patches of the darker green of pine and cedar, and dotted with tiny lakes, like vari-shaped jewels, sapphire-blue against the green.

Here and there nestled a tiny village or a cluster of farm buildings, while in and out between them ran narrow silver ribbons, roads white with summer dust, appearing and disappearing among the verdure.

It was, as Billie had said, a gorgeous view, but it gave small comfort to the would-be mystery-solvers. No mounted figure appeared on any of the roads, though they watched carefully for half an hour or more, and presently, as the sun was sinking low in the west, they reluctantly turned their horses homeward, tired and somewhat disheartened, but determined to extend their search to the valley back of the hill the next day.

But the next day it rained—one of those chill, northeast storms that sometimes sweep New England in the early summer as a sort of reminder that autumn and winter are not as far off as they seem. Mist and rain and a dismal, soughing wind shrouded everything all that day and the next. The third dawned lowering but with signs of an early return to normalcy.

Billie and Clark both arose early. Time had not hung heavily on their hands in spite of the weather, for they had found a great deal to talk about and on subjects quite remote from Elinor and mysterious disappearances. Still both were anxious to prosecute the search, hopeless as it seemed, and they were soon in the saddle.

"Today will settle one thing, anyway," said Billie, as they rode in among the still dripping maples on their way to Prospect Hill, "whether Elinor has really disappeared or not. According to her plans, she should arrive this afternoon, and if she does not, or if Mrs. Sargeant, her housekeeper, does not hear from her, even mother will have to admit something serious has happened."

Clark nodded absently. As a matter of fact he was puzzled over the seemingly inexplicable but none the less undeniable fact that Elinor's disappearance, while it still worried him greatly, did not seem of the same vital, cataclysmic importance that it had when he first heard of it that night.

Was it only four days ago over the table of the little Sullivan Street restaurant?

And, oddly enough, Billie was experiencing a somewhat similar phenomena. She loved Elinor, was worried about her, wanted to find her, but—but when Elinor *was* found or came back Clark would—Clark loved Elinor. Clark! Oh! *What* was Clark Mears to her? He was *Elinor's* friend. He—She put the half-formed thoughts away resolutely with a vague panicky feeling that she was on the verge of a mental treachery to her cousin and friend.

THE sun was breaking through the scudding cloud rack when they reached the top of Prospect Hill, and the valley was beginning to steam under the warm rays. A subtle fragrance was in the air; the fragrance of warm, wet earth, of pine and fir balsam and growing things. A world washed clean and clad in a mantle of shaded green, from the Nile of the fields of winter rye and young corn to the deep, almost purple tones of the evergreens. The calendar proclaimed it summer, but the earth swam in an aura of spring.

Instinctively the two young people avoided each other's eyes, as in silence they picked their way down the steep, winding path. At the foot of the hill a narrow, grass-grown road led into the thick woods.

"There are only three ways that a person on horseback can go from here," said Billie as they drew rein. "Skirting the woods to the right will bring you to the Nurse farm, and to the left is the Scott place. This road leads to the old Sargent place, but it has been deserted ever since I can remember. We might go to Scott's and inquire first, and it isn't far to Nurse's from there by the main road,"

"Let's look at the deserted place first," suggested Clark. "We're just casting about blindly, anyway, and we might pick up a clue there as well as anywhere."

Billie assented without enthusiasm, and they turned into the narrow grass-grown and weed-choked road, Clark leading, but before they had advanced a hundred feet he suddenly jerked his horse to a standstill and flung himself from the saddle.

"By George, we're on the right track!" he cried, kneeling in the wet grass. "Look here, a hoof-print! And fresh! Made since the rain stopped this morning."

"It's a saddle or driving horse, too," Billie proclaimed excitedly. "No work or farm horse is shod like that. And there are no wheel marks, so it must be a saddle horse."

Clark sprang up handing her the rein of his horse.

"You stay here with the horses," he said quickly, "while I scout ahead on foot, and see if I can find others. The grass and weeds are so thick."

He went ahead eagerly, leaving his sentence unfinished as he scanned the ground carefully. In spite of the undergrowth, it was not difficult to follow the fresh trail. For nearly a hundred yards it was clearly marked, then suddenly it turned at right angles and disappeared into the thick woods.

Clark paused, perplexed. The breast-high undergrowth in the woods looked formidable. No use trying to follow there. He turned back and shouted to Billie, intending to tell her of the *impasse* he had come to, but his halloo was echoed by the whirring rush of a cock partridge as the bird, startled at its feeding, took wing, and before he could repeat it a scream of terror from Billie drained the blood from his cheeks.

"Billie!" he cried at the top of his voice. "What's the matter? Ohoo-hoo! Billie!"

But there was no answer. A sudden sinister silence seemed to have settled over the woods and with a sinking fear at his heart he started running toward the road.

In his college days Clark had done the hundred yards in ten-two, and now, encumbered though he was by the underbrush and heavy riding boots, he did it under fifteen, but short as the time was, it was sufficient to allow him to arrive at a startling realization. *He loved Billie.* Elinor, all the others, faded into insignificance. They had been shadows. Billie was the substance, the real thing.

AS he emerged from the woods the first thing he saw was Billie's mare, riderless, and nosing gently at the girl herself, who lay in a huddled heap upon the ground. In a second he had her in his arms, noting with immense relief that she was breathing normally and that there was no sign of blood or serious injury. Then her eyes fluttered open and met his and what she read there brought the color back to her cheeks with a rush. Only for a second or two did their eyes remain locked, but in that brief instant was asked and answered the question of the ages. They both *knew*.

Laughing nervously, Billie freed herself and rose gingerly to her feet.

"I'm all right," she said a bit shakily. "It was that darned partridge. He zoomed out of the woods almost under Rod's nose and the silly old plug reared back and jerked me out of the saddle. Huh! Look at the innocent lamb," she added, stamping her feet tentatively in search of possible injury and pointing to where the bay gelding was calmly nibbling grass and trampling his trailing reins a few yards away. "He——"

She broke off suddenly, staring wide-eyed at a gaily colored bit of linen lying on the ground almost at her feet. Then with a cry she swooped upon it.

"Clark, look!" she exclaimed.

"Why—Why, it's only your handkerchief," he replied, somewhat dazed by her vehemence.

"But it's *not* mine, silly," she returned excitedly. It's Elinor's. One of a dozen I gave her last Christmas, and *it wasn't there when you left me.* Remember, we were looking closely for tracks. We couldn't have missed it. Clark, she was here while I was unconscious, saw me fall, probably, and rushed out to see if I were hurt. Then, when she saw I was only stunned and heard you coming she ran back into the woods. She must be near here now.

Elinor!" she called, raising her voice. ELINOR! ELINOR!"

But though she called a dozen times, only the gentle murmur of the wind in the trees answered her.

"Look here, Billie," said Clark at last, a bit grimly, "I've been suspicious of this mysterious disappearance thing for some time. If Elinor was here, as her handkerchief seems to prove, then it stands to reason she is all right and simply doesn't *want* to be found. I don't pretend even to guess what her object is. Maybe it's a new kind of game like treasure hunting, but, anyway, I say, since she wants to stay lost, let her. And let us go home."

And though Billie at first demurred, they presently mounted and slowly retraced their path up the hill, riding close together.

A moment later, at the edge of the woods they had just left, a slender figure in a dust-brown riding habit rose from a clump of bushes and peered cautiously after them—a dark, clever-looking girl in whose wide gray eyes was an expression of mingled tenderness and amusement and possibly a tinge of regret.

Motionless, she watched them out of sight, then, with a half-humorous sigh she turned and plunged into the woods.

"So much for psychology," she murmured. "I never thought of Clark. Well, he's eliminated, anyway, quite conclusively, and Dick—" She sighed again, but there was no humor in it this time. "Dick didn't even enter the lists."

She turned into a grass-grown road so nearly reclaimed by the surrounding woods that only one familiar with it could have found it and presently emerged into a clearing before a dilapitated farmhouse; the deserted and almost forgotten property of the

James's housekeeper. Mounting the rickety back porch, she unlocked and pushed open the sagging door and entered what was originally the kitchen, but which now was more or less sketchily furnished to meet the requirements of a one-room apartment.

But on the threshold she paused with a gasp of astonishment. Only a dim light filtered through the cracks of the closed and nailed-up shutters, but it was sufficient to reveal to her the figure of a man sprawled comfortably and at ease in a big Windsor rocking-chair.

"Dick!" she whispered unbelievingly. "Dick!"

"Hello, Nell," replied Dick Harvey casually. "Thought I'd find you here. When I saw this room fixed up as it is, I knew I was right, so I waited. Sally Sargent was an accessory before the fact, I suppose."

"She—she helped me," admitted Elinor somewhat breathlessly. "But—but how did you get in?"

"Roof of the woodshed—upper window," explained Dick easily. "We used to play 'haunted house' here, remember, when we were kids?"

"But how did you *find* me?" asked the girl eagerly.

"Simple, too," returned Dick. "First, I sent Clark off to take up the trail in the middle up here, and incidentally to meet Billie; bit of your favorite psychology in that. I thought they might fall for each other, and then I started on the trail at the *beginning* as a proper sleuth should. Went to your flat, found out what you had taken with you and what new things you had bought. Traced you to the station at Springfield, then to here.

Of course, I had the very great advantage of knowing you rather intimately from childhood, your mental processes and reactions, and the country also. I knew, of course, that you had turned Clark down on account of what you considered his futility, but I thought possibly you were trying to give him a chance to prove his worth in an emergency."

"Dick!" Elinor's voice rose in protest. "I never even thought of Clark Mears. He is a nice boy and Billie suits him, but he is utterly *unsuited* to me, mentally, intellectually, eugenicly and in every other way."

"That being the case," said Dick, rising and coming toward her, "and he being eliminated anyway as a rival—oh, yes, I've been watching things from the tidelines as you have, and incidentally keeping an eye on you in case of accident or tramps or anything—perhaps you might consider *me?*"

His voice suddenly became deeper and very tender, all trace of banter lost. "I've cared, Nell, ever since I used to push you about in your perambulator when I could barely reach the handles."

"I know it, Dick," replied the girl frankly and without a trace of coquetry. "So have I. But you never said anything. You always treated me as a sister, though we are only cousins by marriage, so I couldn't be *sure.* That's why I disappeared. It was more of my psychology. I thought if I were *lost,* perhaps you would—would want to—find me."

"I did," said Dick gravely. "I have."

"BUT I still do not see how you pulled that disappearing stunt from the stable," said Dick some hours later as they sat before the fire in the cheerful James library. "It's uncanny."

"Oh, that!" returned Elinor. "Pure accident. I took advantage of unexpected circumstances. That is all. Up to that point I'd followed my original plan. Gone by train to Springfield, motored from there to the place Mrs. Sargeant had fixed for me at her father's old farm—she is a most satisfactory confederate—took the new horse

and rode to your place, at a time I knew Aunt Carrie and Yates would be away. They always go to town Monday mornings and usually Bessie goes too. Then I gave Billie my mystery talk and rode on to the stable. What I intended to do was to talk a little longer with Billie and then ride away apparently toward home and disappear. I led the horse into Rod's stall—he was out in the pasture with the roans—threw Rod's blanket over him, and went into the stall to tie him up. Then Billie came in. She couldn't see me. She couldn't see anything but two horses in their accustomed stalls, wearing their accustomed blankets. I heard her gasp of atonishment and kept still. She called and searched everywhere but *in* the stall.

"It was simply another example of practical psychology. The stable looked perfectly normal to her. She saw the two horses and took it for granted they were Phyllis and Roderick. Rod and my horse are both dark bays with black points, and of course she could see only the tail and hind legs. It never occurred to her to examine them closely or look for me apart from my horse. She did go in to question Mary, but soon came back, saddled Phyllis and dashed off. Then I just quietly rode away, while Mary was out in the yard on the other side of the house. The fact that Mary didn't see me when I rode *in* was pure luck, and the weather was luck, too."

"It was clever, just the same," said Dick. "But wasn't there a chance that Billie might have noticed Rod's absence when she came back."

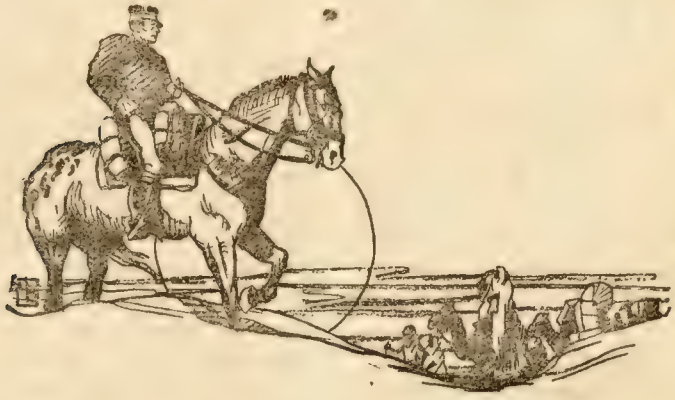
"A chance, yes, but I counted on Yates being back before Billie. She would take it for granted he had turned Rod out after his return, if she noticed it at all."

"Well, it succeeded, anyway," admitted Elinor. "Practical psychology has made two young people very happy."

"Three," asserted Dick.

"Four," said Elinor decisively.

Dick accepted the correction.



The Second Theft

By ALEXANDER MORRISON

IT LOOKED as if the proverbial bull had entered a china shop, as three men paused just outside the open doorway to peer into the room. Scattered over the floor of this narrow room were pieces of china in a sort of confused regularity, while along the wall above them extended a shelf, now empty and tipped drunkenly toward the floor. Lining the opposite wall was a similar shelf containing silverware arranged in a neat row, each piece carefully labeled.

"Well, is this why you summoned Mr. Queg, simply because a shelf has broken and destroyed some china?"

"No, sir, although that china was the only proof set of that pattern of Old Staffordshire."

" 'Proof' set?" interrupted Ruff.

"Unbroken, in perfect condition, sir. That's a tragedy in itself, as the china was worth thousands, but together with the missing silver and—and him——"

He took a step toward the door and pointed to where, concealed from them as they had stood there, lay a crumpled, pajama-clad body in a pool of blood. One glance sufficed to prove he was dead.

"Ah! Have you entered the room?"

"I was careful not to so so, sir."

Queg nodded his silent approbation and drew out his ever-ready pencil and paper to supplement his partner's questions with those of his own, which he, being deaf and dumb, must write, not speak. He studied this man, as the latter began to talk distinctly, so that his lips might be read by Queg, and mentally decided he was one of those who was always careful not to do anything rash or unintelligent. He was not prepossessing in appearance, except that the combination of a six-foot stature with snow-white hair added a certain dignity to his otherwise neutral and colorless personality.

"I am Radolph Solon, gentlemen, and have acted as Mr. Caleb's secretary-custodian for fifteen years. While he is abroad, I am staying here to keep an eye on his collection, a quite valuable one. This morning I found the door open and the room as you see it now. At a glance I could see that several of the smaller silver antiques were gone, and then I discovered Henri, his servant who was here with me, lying there dead."

"You heard nothing?"

"Nothing. I was out until after midnight, so I left the key to the room with Henri, who often took a last look around for me before retiring. The door was closed when I came in, so I went directly to my room. It is on the third floor at the further end of the house, hence I heard nothing."

"Were there no safety devices, alarms, and so on, installed here?" This was Queg's written question.

"No. Someone was always in the house and the door to this room was kept locked. Although immensely valuable, the collection never seemed to worry Mr. Caleb—the safety of it, I mean."

There was a pause while Queg ex-

amined the lock on the door and glanced up at the windows of the room. They were steel-sashed and placed about eight feet from the floor of the high posted room, being rather wide and shallow in dimensions. His keen eyes scrutinized each in turn, stopping for a moment over one in particular, but his face was expressionless as he signaled Ruff to continue with his questions.

"You phoned us immediately, you say?"

"After one brief look. Mr. Ruff, the china can be mended, but will of course lose an immense part of its value, being no longer proof, yet I am anxious to keep this out of the papers."

"Where did this Henri sleep?" Ruff brushed his anxiety aside.

"In the servant's wing overlooking this room."

"Any strangers about here lately?"

"None. I've been thinking over all that while waiting for you."

Queg, seemingly satisfied for the time being, proceeded into the room after signing his desire to examine it alone. He walked gingerly down the centre of it, avoiding the broken china, pausing now and then to study something that caught his eye, but touching nothing. Reaching the end of the room, which was approximately fifty feet long, he retraced his steps and bent over the dead man, who had obviously been killed by a heavy china serving dish hurled at his head. This had cut an artery in his forehead, probably stunning him with the blow so that he died from loss of blood without having regained consciousness.

"Was the light on when you came down this morning?" questioned Queg by a note.

"No, sir. As I said, I have touched nothing and as the light is off now, it must have been so when I first came here."

Queg beckoned to his partner, and this time made a more exhaustive examination of the room, calling Ruff's attention to each clue by a nod or gesture. The first of the thief's traces was about halfway down the room, where the tilted shelf on which the china had been displayed held their attention for a moment. Black velvet covered its surface, while indentations in its soft nap marked where each piece of china had rested.

The spot to which Queg pointed, however, outlined another mark, a footprint, well defined at the toe which pointed toward the wall, but blurred toward the heel as if the foot had slipped over the edge of the shelf, probably when it collapsed.

A glance underneath the shelf revealed that two of its brackets had torn from the wall, thus tipping off its display. A broken piece of china just below this foot mark was almost pulverized.

"Stepped on and ground in by a heel, eh?" commented Ruff.

AT THE further corner of the room, Queg showed Ruff another mark on the polished floor, a heel print outlined by bits of the powdered china which had clung to it, then passed on to pause before one of the silver pitchers on the shelf that was still intact. Here its smooth surface held the imprint of a right hand that had clutched it for a moment, then released it for some other object; but it showed a hand with the middle finger missing.

A little further on, a second hand print was faintly outlined on a platter, giving only its general shape as if the hand had been covered by a thin glove.

Upon a written request from Queg, Ruff called to Solon, who was

still in the hall outside the room, to procure a step-ladder, and when this had been brought, Queg placed it beneath the window just above the foot mark on the shelf and mounted it. He spent several minutes in silent study, opening the window's catch, minutely examining the sill and wall beneath it, and finally descending to let Ruff mount. What the latter found was a weak latch which had obviously been pried open and several scars and scratches on the metal frame.

"A pretty clear trail, I should say, and it ought to be easy to trace the thief," he said when he faced his partner, enunciating the words without speaking them aloud. Queg looked up from a bit of the broken china he had been examining and his eyes were alert, excited.

"A rather tall, heavy man with one finger missing gained admittance through that window, stepped on the shelf, which broke, probably hid in that corner of the room where the heel mark is, until Henri came, killed him with a platter, then collected what small pieces of silver he could carry away and made his escape by the same route."

"A perfectly logical deduction, as far as it goes," wrote Queg. "Check up on the outside as to his method of gaining the window."

Ruff would have liked to ask another question, but as Queg turned to beckon Solon to his side, he quickly left the room. When he had gone, Solon, being extremely careful not to touch anything or step on the china, checked up the silverware and reported a loss of many small pieces totaling thousands of dollars in market value. He completed his list just as Ruff reentered, his face twisted into a puzzled frown.

"The ground is very soft under the window, Queg, but there are absolutely no marks on it. The wall of this room is set back from the edge of the foundation in such a way that a man might edge along it and thus avoid stepping on the ground, but it would be impossible to use a ladder, as it would have to stand perfectly straight, otherwise it could not be mounted."

"Do you think you can find this thief?" wrote Queg after a pause.

"Ought to. He's probably got a police record, and the missing finger should help."

"And his—shall we call it—accomplice?"

"Why, I thought he worked alone! Look at the various marks. And he only took what one man could carry."

"He was alone then, I'll admit, but —well, you trace him, Ruff, while I attend to his more interesting—accomplice!"

"But I don't understand what you mean."

"I can't stop to explain now, Ruff. See if you can trace the thief, but before you go, collect the pieces of a single plate. Take one with at least three pieces, and be sure they fit together to form a whole plate. Leave it at the office, then send for the coroner and impress it upon him that no news of this affair must leak out for a day or so. Have the body removed from this room, but otherwise disturb nothing, and lock it behind you."

With these instructions, Queg left the room taking Solon with him, while Ruff stood for a moment in thought, then studied each of the clues again intently as if to find what he had evidently overlooked.

Only one fact impressed him, and that concerned the platter which had killed Henri. From the position and number of its pieces, it had obviously been whole when thrown, yet every other plate had been broken when the shelf fell. This may have

been merely a freak. It was possible that one should remain whole; yet he was not quite satisfied with such an explanation, though he could think of no other.

QUEG had made a complete survey of the gardens and minutely examined the ground beneath the window, but discovered nothing beyond what Ruff had already told him. Now, as he finished a hasty look through the rooms on the ground floor of the house, Solon suddenly touched him on the arm, informing him that the bell had just rung to announce a visitor and asking whether he should admit him.

Queg nodded assent and stepped into the hall to watch.

As soon as the door was opened, a short, anaemic man stepped in, with the air of one accustomed to the household. With the sunlight at his back, the harsh shadows on his face accentuated his sunken cheeks and deep-set eyes, while his skin seemed parchment-like in texture; but Solon greeted him quite eagerly.

"This is Professor Kent, Mr. Queg. Professor, I might explain Mr. Queg is deaf and dumb, but can read your lips when you speak. He is here to investigate the tragedies."

"Tragedies?"

"Murder and theft."

"What do you mean?" Kent's voice was high and nasal, and he stepped back in sincere horror.

While Solon briefly explained, Queg watched Kent's face curiously. Though he had never met this man before, his fame as an explorer and archeologist in years past was well known to him, yet it seemed hard to reconcile this diminutive figure with tales of intrepid adventures in lands no white man had entered before his advent.

"You say every piece of his Old Staffordshire china is broken? Poor Caleb. Naturally, I am interested in the silver, too," he added parenthetically to Queg, "but the china has a special appeal to me as I have the only other complete set of that pattern, though it is not proof. Of course it is cleverly mended, but now—well, we, Caleb and I, have lost a very pleasant subject for rivalry and argument."

"The murder transcends both losses," wrote Queg briefly.

"Naturally, sir. But who could have done such an act of vandalism? If I can be of any help to you——"

"I believe you can," interrupted Queg. "There are several questions I should like to ask you, but they must wait for the time being. If I might call upon you, say tomorrow morning, I should like to learn some facts about how Caleb obtained this set and so on, as I presume you can enlighten me?"

"Gladly, and if in the meantime——" Kent left the sentence unfinished, as Queg bowed and drew him toward the door. He walked to the street with him and cautioned him not to mention the affair to anyone, before leaving him and hastening to his office.

There he found the broken pieces of china which Ruff had left for him and began to study them intently. This particular plate had smashed into four parts like huge slices of a pie, and after a sharp scrutiny of one of them Queg leaned back thoughtfully in his chair.

Suddenly he broke his reverie by taking a small hammer from a drawer and tapping with it on the china until it cracked neatly in half. A grim smile of satisfaction spread over his face as he placed the fragments on his desk and took up a paper-covered parcel which he had brought from Caleb's house.

When unwrapped, this proved to

contain two iron brackets of the sort which fit close to a wall or shelf without a diagonal brace. These he placed at once in his drawer, put away the china carefully, and left the room.

It was late afternoon when Ruff, tired and crestfallen, rejoined his partner in the office.

"Not much luck, Queg. The police records show nothing, though I'd expected help from them, and no one in the neighborhood has seen a stranger at all, as far as I could learn, without giving away the truth."

"That corroborates my idea. The theft was not committed by a professional," answered Queg in shorthand. "The marks on the window, the clumsy way he broke the shelf and left his handprint, everything indicates he was an amateur."

"But no amateur could have gotten in the window without a ladder!"

"He did, however, and just how it was accomplished without flying I hope to prove tonight. If he was an amateur, I am confident he will return to Caleb's house tonight and fall into my trap. You see, the newspapers will contain a human-interest story about Caleb I have given them, incidentally adding the information that Solon was called away to rejoin his employer, leaving the house empty. That, I think, will tempt our burglar to return for more booty, thinking he is quite safe."

"But what of Henri? Oh, you mean the thief knows he is dead already?"

Queg did not reply to this question, but directed Ruff to prepare for a night's vigil in the grounds near Caleb's house, adding that he would be on hand himself to learn just how the window was entered, as this point was still a mystery to him.

IT WAS well Queg made this decision, for the evening terminated in several unexpected events. Queg and Ruff had concealed themselves in the yard soon after dark, the former crouched in the shadow of a bulkhead, the latter perched in a tree, but their wait proved a long one, for it was after one o'clock that Ruff first sensed the approach of footsteps. A shadow moved near the corner of the house and a man slid into view.

After a quick look about and a stare at the silent house, he beckoned into the darkness and moved forward along the jutting foundation stones to be followed by two other stealthy figures, each carrying a suitcase and the last a rake over his shoulder.

Directly under the scarred window the second man produced a sort of crude rope ladder from beneath his coat. This he balanced upon the rake by two large hooks fastened to the ends of the rope, thus raising them and dropping them to the window sill, where they caught in the sash, leaving the ladder hanging against the side of the house.

The leader climbed up this, opened the window easily, and straddled it until his companion joined him, drawing up the ladder after him to place it inside the room. The other man remained on guard below.

For a moment all was still, then, when the guard turned slightly to look toward the street, Queg leaped to his feet and covered the space between them with three agile bounds, catching the man as he crumpled beneath a single, well-directed blow from the butt of a revolver. Ruff joined him immediately and carried the limp body around the corner of

the house, then hid once more as Queg took the place of the watcher, pulling the latter's cap well down over his eyes.

Soon the two men appeared again on the window sill and silently lowered the suitcase, heavy with silver. Then one of them began to descend to the ground, where he felt Queg's revolver pressed into his side and a hand clamped over his mouth before he could utter a sound. His companion, busily closing the window, followed, to be covered instantly by Ruff.

When Queg removed his hand from his captive's mouth the latter glared defiantly at his leader.

"An' you said this was a cinch, damn ye! I'd never 'ave come——"

"Shut up!" growled the other, keeping his hands well above his head before Ruff's threatening revolver, and thereby disclosing that one finger on his right hand was missing.

"So, after you murdered a man it was a cinch, eh?" sneered Ruff, goading them on to speak.

"Murder? Say, what ye givin' me? I ain't——"

"I never done nothin' before, honest I ain't," broke in his pal, cowering at the threat of murder. "He worked it alone the first time, an' me an' Spike only come along when he says it——"

He was interrupted by a wild cry, a shout of "Police! Police!" that came from behind the ell of the house, followed by a running figure, Solon, who stopped abruptly in his flight to stare at the four men.

"It's all right, Solon, we've got 'em. Call the police!"

"But there's another—dead."

"Just stunned, and we put him there. Now get the police."

It was then Queg struck a match and held it so Ruff could see his lips while he moved them silently, after which the latter turned to the leader of the thieves to ask: "How did you come to enter the house that way? Think up that plan yourself?"

"Aw, I seen the other bird doin' it and took a chance meself," he muttered sullenly.

Ruff laughed aloud at this poor attempt at an excuse, but Queg nodded silently and handed over his prisoners without further questioning when the police arrived.

But when the silver in the suitcases had been taken into the house Queg began to question Solon keenly.

"I instructed you to keep away from this house and out of sight. Why are you here?"

"I—I was afraid."

"Afraid we couldn't handle this affair?"

"Oh, no, sir, not that. I did not know you intended to be here, and I was afraid to leave the house unguarded."

"Why were you looking out here in the gardens, then?"

"Because I saw you examine that window, so thought——"

"For no other reason?"

"No, sir."

Queg looked at Solon fixedly for a moment, then instructed him briefly to remain in the house for the rest of the night, but to appear at his office at 9 o'clock the following morning. This done, he beckoned to Ruff and they departed in silence.

RUFF had been waiting impatiently to ask his partner a number of questions about Henri's death, but Queg did not arrive at the office until after Solon appeared, so there was no chance to satisfy his curiosity. Queg greeted them with a silent nod, carefully wrapped up the broken plate and the brackets he took from his drawer, then scribbled a brief note for them both to read:

"As it is quite possible Professor Kent might have seen one of the thieves, we shall proceed to his house and take him with us to identify them. Moreover, there are a few questions I should like to ask him about this china before accusing the murderer."

"Perhaps I can answer them for you," suggested Solon.

"I doubt it. For example, what does a single plate weigh? You cannot tell me, I see, but Kent can, for we can weigh one of his plates."

Ruff could not restrain his curiosity longer, breaking in, "But if this china was broken by accident?"

"It was a most fortunate accident, Ruff, for otherwise we might not have apprehended the murderer. Now, gentlemen, the taxi is waiting."

Ruff tried to resume his questioning, but Queg shook his head and refused to answer as they drove toward the Professor's house. About halfway to their destination Solon, who had remained thoughtful and silent, suddenly uttered an exclamation and sat up tensely in his seat, his face pale and strained, but he did not speak.

The Professor greeted them eagerly, seizing his hat and coat to accompany them when informed of the capture of the thieves. But Queg stopped him at the door with a request that they delay this visit to the prisoners until after he had asked a few questions, so Kent led the way to a sort of study crowded with curiosities from all parts of the world, explaining, "My sanctum, where nothing is disturbed and we can talk confidentially."

WHILE Ruff recounted the story of the return and apprehension of the thieves, Queg wandered about the room, examining the curios with great interest. Some of them he lifted from their places to scrutinize more closely, being careful to replace them in the exact spot they had occupied, an easy task, as each left a ring of dust or a clean spot where it had reposed. But as soon as Ruff had finished his tale Queg came to the desk where Kent sat and began to write a question.

"Professor Kent, as you have been told, Henri was killed by a blow from one of those plates. Can you tell me the weight of those platters?"

"Why, I don't know that I'm sure, Mr. Queg. I never had occasion to weigh one of them."

"Perhaps we can do so now. If you will get me one of yours, we can at least approximate the weight of the proof ones."

"I'm afraid this will be impossible, sir. You see, my set is not proof, but was very cleverly mended by a special process which made them look quite well at a little distance, so I had them put in special air-tight cases which would preserve the cement better. Unless it is quite vital, I should not like to disturb them."

"I see. That will not be necessary, then. May I see them for a moment?"

Kent bowed and led them to another room of trophies around which ran a glass case filled with the china. It was attached to the wall some distance above a person's head and seemed sealed and tight as Kent had explained. Queg put on a pair of glasses the better to examine them, spending several minutes peering at each one, then silently returned to the room in which they had been gathered.

By a note he sent Solon to procure the package he had left in the taxi, and when it had been brought, unwrapped it and laid out the broken pieces and the two brackets on

the desk. Then he withdrew some papers from his pocket, handing them to Ruff, who began to read aloud from them.

"I regret at such a time as this that I cannot speak, but could I do so, I should explain the mystery to you gentlemen somewhat as follows:

"There were two distinct crimes committed at Caleb's house, the second accidentally disclosing the first, hence it is logical we explain them in that order.

"The thief who obtained his first booty the night before last was an amateur, carelessly leaving a clear trail behind him and falling into the trap for his return that I had set for him. He brought two accomplices this time in order to carry away a larger amount of the silverware, but they did not accompany him on his first visit. That is all quite self-explanatory save for one fact. Although an amateur, he was remarkably clever as to his method of entering the room. How did he come to discover such a trick? He claims it was copied from another thief whom he had seen enter by that method. Yet nothing was taken before his visit, you will claim.

"Apparently that is true, but actually a gradual, continuous theft had been taking place for days if not weeks. That someone else had preceded him was proved by the number of scars on the window-sash and the imprint of a gloved hand, whereas his finger-marks were quite plain."

ALL eyes were fixed upon Ruff's as he read, so intensely, in fact, that no one noticed Queg's slight nod and the silent appearance in the doorway of the chauffeur who had driven them to this house.

"Let us now skip to the night of the murder and reconstruct the scene and events as they occurred. A man steals into the yard, drawing a rope from under his coat; deftly he tosses this toward the window-sill where a hook, attached to the end of the rope, catches on the edge and holds firm. This he mounts hand-over-hand, unlatches the window which has a weak catch, and steps lightly to the shelf upon which the china is displayed, thence safely to the floor. As he is quite familiar with the room, he uses only a flashlight so as not to attract attention.

"While he is busy about his task, undoubtedly congratulating himself that this is to be his last trip there, the lights flash on and Henri enters the room. The tableau is dramatic, especially when Henri recognizes and challenges the intruder.

"What happens then? The thief angrily hurls what is in his hand at that moment, one of the proof platters, stunning and inadvertently killing Henri. In a panic the thief flees, feeling a suspicious sagging of the shelf as he leaps from it to the window to escape. It was after this that the other thief came, breaking the insecure shelf by his weight and accomplishing his burglary without knowing he was in the presence of a dead man, for the lights had been turned off and his eyes were fixed greedily on the silver.

"Who was this first thief and what was his purpose? Perhaps Professor Kent can tell us that!"

As Ruff paused, Kent sprang to his feet and drew a few steps backward toward the door, shouting, "It's a lie! I know nothing about it. You can't prove——"

He stopped speaking abruptly as the chauffeur's hand fell upon his shoulder, and Queg motioned Ruff to read on.

"His purpose was to abstract the

proof set of china, piece by piece, leaving in its place his own mended plates. Only one plate remained to be taken, and this was the one with which he killed Henri. That is why the china broke so easily in falling from the shelf; broke into its already mended parts; but each of these edges was discolored with cement, proving the breaks were not clean, fresh ones.

"Is any other proof necessary? Let him explain why he brought two new brackets to the house the following morning! He did not know of the second theft and discovery, and hoped by his friendship with Solon to gain admittance to that room, mend the sagging shelf, and cover his tracks before 'discovering' the dead body."

Kent began to struggle and curse, but to no avail, for the man who held him expertly slipped on a pair of handcuffs and led him away.

"Then the proof set is in his case here?" questioned Ruff.

"Yes. If you had worn these magnifying glasses, you could have seen those plates were not mended and the story of the air-tight cabinets was false," wrote Queg with a smile. "As to his rope ladder, that was a guess in part until I came here. I have read of explorers who used such a means of ascending difficult cliffs, and when I saw this——"

He ceased writing to point to a coil of rope among the curios. It was old and worn, but not covered with dust as were the other articles in the room.

"I almost suspected it, on the way here," muttered Solon. "But Kent —why, he had so many things himself that he——"

"He had collector's greed also. The very knowledge that his china was not proof ate into his mind and became an obsession with him; at least that is the charitable view to take. I do not believe he meant to kill Henri, yet once done—— But why try to explain or excuse the devious workings of a mind cramped by cupidity?"

A Crooked Picture

By GILBERT RIDDELL

THE jewel-setter lived on Hudson Street, Mrs. Hammond said; Hudson Street opposite a little, triangular park. You followed Twelfth Street past Eighth Avenue. Mr. Cummings had said that you could trust him—he was thoroughly honest.

"Now that I'm down here tonight," Mrs. Hammond added, "I should like to go there. I've got the diamonds with me."

They were earrings that had been left her by her mother, recently deceased, and she wished to have them reset in platinum rings.

"They are the purest of pure white stones," she went on, taking them from her beaded bag and exhibiting them for the admiration of her friend, Jennie Anderson, with whom she was dining tête-â-tête.

Mrs. Hammond was exhibiting other diamonds on her fingers, in her ears and at her throat, that looked quite as valuable to Jennie, but the owner denied this and insisted that her mother's earrings were worth at least one thousand dollars each.

Jennie Anderson, hitherto incapable of distinguishing the real from the imitation in diamonds, made a silent, rough calculation, estimating that the lady who had invited her to dine in this Greenwich Village restaurant must be worth at least ten thousand dollars as she stood, or sat.

Jennie was young and pretty enough to have paid little heed to the well-advertised crime wave from which New York was usually suffering. But she was also poor, and her calculations had been followed by the reflection that with ten thousand dollars, the price of Mrs. Hammond, as she was decked out tonight, she could do much that clamored at her heart for action.

SHE glanced around. There was a young man with slanting light green eyes at the next table. He was well-dressed, and his companion was the usual, expected, bob-haired flapper. Jennie's eyes encountered his. They had been sweeping Mrs. Hammond's expensive exterior with a comprehensive glance. It was as he turned away that his glance crossed Jennie Anderson's, and the greed was still in them.

"Where," asked Jennie, who suddenly recalled that Mrs. Hammond had never mentioned Mrs. Cummings before, "where did you meet Mrs. Cummings?"

"Oh, down in Florida, just before I came away. We were at the same hotel. I showed her mother's diamonds and told her that I wanted to have them reset. She said that I could not do better than employ the services of Mr. Jenkins. She showed me several rings that he had reset for her, and they were beautiful."

"But," Jennie objected, "Hudson Street. I know it—the park and everything. There are only some old-fashioned flats there—no stores."

"Jenkins works at home, in his old flat. It's all old—the house, the flat, the man, the business. Something quaint and old New Yorkish; something for a young girl like you to see."

"But, so late at night, the streets are dark over there. Prohibition has not done away with corner loafers, you know. You should be afraid?"

"Not a bit!" announced Mrs. Hammond, laughing at her young friend's fears. "Come on, let's go!"

MRS. HAMMOND congratulated herself that she had, sturdily enough, "sprung from the soil." The soil had had a gold streak in it, as witness her diamonds, her Park avenue apartment, her Rolls Royce (which she was not using tonight), her expensive husband, whom she seldom saw but adored just the same. But she liked to go back to the "soil" once in a while. She could remember, although she did not speak of them, days and nights when the cold-water flat that Jennie Anderson had never known was as familiar to her as the Ritz of London and Pre-Catalan of Paris now.

Secretly, unadmitted to herself, she enjoyed roaming through these dark streets, smelling the scents of spring that New York still manages to exude, spying benignly on young lovers parked on old brown stoops, just as in her necessarily forgotten youth!

Jennie followed her hostess, that well-advertised patroness of the struggling artist, into which category Jennie so necessarily fell, wondering when the lurking bandit would leap upon that gleaming woman at her side. For the few bright lights they encountered struck sparks from the person of Mrs. Hammond that must have proclaimed to any spectator that her gems were real.

The young May moon had vanished. Mrs. Hammond drew her rich furs, clasped with a diamond clasp, closer around her slender body, as Jennie tossed her batiked scarf aside, threw out her chest and breathed deeply of the glorious cool air. Her action had swerved her body around a trifle, and her sharp young eyes caught sight of what seemed to her a sinister figure, —a tall young man, alone now, with slanting gray-green eyes.

He was going in the same direction.

Jennie brought her attention sharply back to Mrs. Hammond. Would it be any use to warn that fatuous woman, convinced that all the crime-wave stories about her native city were grossly exaggerated, chiefly to enhance the fortunes of newspaper owners?

Mrs. Hammond was talking rapidly as they walked.

"I shall have the platinum setting, if he doesn't charge too much. I telephoned his wife today and she said he would see me tonight about nine-thirty. The wife makes the appointments. He never uses the telephone. A quaint old character."

Mrs. Hammond was fond of discovering and exploiting quaint characters, whether young or old.

Jennie Anderson, so sure of her genius and her superiority to this wealthy moron, would have been horrified if she could have known that Mrs. Hammond considered her a "quaint character."

TWELFTH street grew darker as they wandered west. The brown stoops were there, but, to Mrs. Hammond's disappointment, there were no lovers.

"At the movies," she thought crossly, but did not air her grievance.

Jennie, listening to the stealthy footsteps that followed so persistently, noticed only the criminal aspects of the corner loafers who, as she had rightly claimed, prohibition had not banished.

If the slanting-eyed one meant no harm, could any of those low-browed, offensively expectorating, leering youths withstand the temptation of that diamond-plastered exterior?

If, as Jennie speculated, this jeweler himself were honest, and if he were not, what a wonderful chance to secure a small fortune! Two women

alone at night in his apartment! A man to whom Mrs. Hammond had been recommended by a chance acquaintance!

"We are in for it!" shuddered Jennie to her shrinking soul.

At the apex of the little triangular park, that large white stone building, with its staggering attempt at classic outlines, destined to act only as a police station, offered to Jennie's sophisticated mind no hope. Most of the modern crimes were committed within "a stone's throw" of some police station.

ON one side, Eighth avenue started to brave its way through New York's uptown traffic. Opposite gloomed that block of Hudson street which boasted only of the tall, old cold-water flat of Mrs. Hammond's youth. Her eyes gleamed softly as she recognized the type.

Jennie was asked to use her "young eyes" to find Jenkins's bell, but even her vernal sight was strained to decipher the name in the dim light of that old vestibule, reeking with the odor of escaping gas.

The footsteps had ceased before they crossed the park, but that, Jennie knew, was only caution. The slant-eyed one could hardly have been in league with old Jenkins. If the jewel-setter were honest, the slant-eyed one would be waiting for them on their exit!

"Press the button again," said Mrs. Hammond. "I didn't turn the knob when I should have."

There was a shade of exasperation in her voice, and it was for her stupidity in forgetting the skill of that golden youth when her strong fingers never failed to work the release, no matter how slight the upstairs pressure.

They entered the bare, time-worn hall and ascended the steep, ladder-like stairs, the ugliness of walls and ceilings impartially revealed by the dim gas jet that burned on each landing.

The hall door had closed automatically behind them, and Jennie was conscious of a devastating shiver running through her body. They were shut in now with what lay ahead of them up that interminable hallway, and she shuddered, as only the young can shudder, at the unknown.

Up and still up they climbed, Mrs. Hammond far in advance, in spite of her disadvantage in years. Jennie found her feet heavy with apprehension, her heart beating feebly with the exertion of ignoring the warnings that her common sense was telegraphing through her body.

What a fool Mrs. Hammond was! What fools they both were! Two women, alone at night, trusting themselves to a strange man, in this backwash of city life, and, if they escaped harm there, later, on the thief-ridden streets of New York! Alone, up at the end of these ladder-like stairs, with a man of whom she had heard through a chance acquaintance! No wonder rich women were robbed so easily! But, if they were only robbed!

Mrs. Hammond was not the sort to court an uglier crime, but she . . .

In a kind of panic, the girl suddenly recalled how frequently she had been told that she was not vain enough. And if it were only that—but she was young, rather desperately young, and looked younger! And there were ghouls about!

A LIGHT, somewhat brighter than the dim gas-jets of the hall, shone suddenly upon them. A face peered over the banisters; a large, oval face, except where the chin sagged in ugly lines; a face all whiteness and old scars, and grinning teeth; large, long teeth like fangs; more fangs of gold intervening between the ancient ivories. A face, surmounted by a long,

veined forehead, receding into hair that lay flat and white upon a long, ill-shapen head; eyes that gleamed, between ugly wrinkled lids, just as the misshapen teeth gleamed, in a welcoming smile.

Below the face, as Jennie presently perceived, there was the rest of an elderly man, a very elderly man, clothed in a cotton shirt and woollen trousers, held carelessly together by a belt. He was a tall man, taller than Mrs. Hammond, and his hands hung long and loose and powerful from the ends of his cuffless sleeves.

He drew back from the banisters, and smilingly ushered Mrs. Hammond in. The door of the apartment opened into a small hall, about five feet square, that, in turn, opened into a dining-room. It was the usual oblong room of that type in that kind of flat, and was furnished with oak furniture of the "golden oak" period.

"My wife and I," Jenkins said, "have lived here thirty years."

But Jennie did not notice the furnishings nor the shape of the room, at first. It was odd; but her attention was immediately caught and held by the crooked picture on the wall over the mantelpiece—the wall opposite the door of the dining-room.

Five minutes later when Jennie realized that she had been placed with extraordinary courtesy on an uncomfortable side chair of oak, and was seated with Mrs. Hammond and Mr. Jenkins around a large, circular dining-room table, covered with an oilcloth table spread, she even then looked at the picture, fascinated. It was so extraordinarily crooked.

She had, of course, seen pictures that had been slightly deranged by reason of an unusually conscientious parlor maid, but this was so unusually crooked that she could not help but wonder how even the most indifferent housekeeper could leave it that way. Moreover, it was the only picture in the room.

Mrs. Hammond's tongue rattled on as usual, and, if Jennie could only have noticed, more happily than usual, for was she not on her native heath?

"My wife," offered the jewel-setter, following Jennie's riveted gaze on the crooked picture and speaking with striking startlingness across Mrs. Hammond's linguistic flow, "has been dusting today."

He smiled as he made this remark directed sharply at Jennie—so sharply that she started, while her soul was revolted by that large, oily, gold-filled smile of the aged man, who was so aged that it seemed as if his skin were decaying before his faculties gave out.

But, thought Jennie, so crooked! Even a hasty, preoccupied duster would notice that she had so tremendously disarranged the only picture in the room! And if not, why did not he, the man for whom the room was dusted, straighten it, as he had so evidently perceived its crookedness?

Her glance fell from the picture to those old, worn-out eyes, and she started again and shuddered. Never in her life had an eye pierced her like that one. Cunning, ability and reserve were in his glance. Diamond valuers must have extraordinary eyes of course, and his were extraordinary—old, but still sharp, sharper than those of most young people. Again she shuddered and raised her eyes to the crooked picture. She felt that his glance followed hers.

"Father bought mother these earrings," Mrs. Hammond was babbling on, "the year they went to Paris. I wish you'd tell me how much they're worth."

"I could tell you better," volunteered Jenkins, "if I removed them from their settings."

Jennie started, violently this time.

Ah, that was it! That would be his game—substitution!

She had heard about that sort of thing. Would Mrs. Hammond be foolish enough to consent to anything like that? Should she attempt to warn her?

But Mrs. Hammond shook her head. "No," she said, "I don't want them disturbed, unless we can come to some agreement about their resetting."

THE door which evidently led into the kitchen was opened, and an elderly woman, clad in a bathrobe over a nightgown, entered.

"My wife," grinned the hideous old man. He rose as courteously as if he were a prince. The old woman bowed with equal grace.

"Huh," thought Jennie, "as if such people with such breeding could have been born and bred in New York, let alone living in such a hole for thirty years! Well, we're in for it."

Mrs. Jenkins's skin was as fine as her husband's was mottled, her hands were as delicate as his were powerful. She smiled as sweetly as he fiercely grinned. A precious couple, thought Jennie, and waited for the next move. She would be powerless to avert it. Mrs. Hammond would be powerless to avert it. They were in for it. They could not escape. Again she raised her eyes to the crooked picture.

"Ah," said Mrs. Jenkins in her high-bred, cultured voice, "I was dusting today."

Jennie turned away disgusted. Well, then, if the duster herself saw what she had done to that picture, why did she not straighten it? Why?

Jennie's alert young mind, speculative, tense, battened on the modern detective story, answered because its extreme crookedness meant something. And before Mrs. Hammond left the room with her ten thousand dollars' worth of diamonds they would know what it meant.

"I will show you some settings," said old Jenkins, in that smooth, oily way of his.

He crossed into the "dark room" with which all such flats are provided, and presently could be heard opening a safe. In fact he could be seen on his knees before the safe door, Jennie perceived, glancing over her shoulder. In another minute he was back, with several small trays in his hands. These trays contained paper-wrapped objects which presently he unwrapped and displayed upon the oilcloth-covered table.

"This stone," he said, "I have just reset for a client. It is more valuable than yours; of larger carat; but yours would look as well if the setting were made smaller."

"Yes," agreed Mrs. Hammond. She reached out her hand for the diamond, and examined it carefully. Old Jenkins continued to unwrap the little packages and spread their gleaming contents on the cheap oak table. Mrs. Hammond removed her rings, her earrings and laid them all on the table.

"I wish," she said, "you would weigh them all, and tell me how much they're worth and how many carats each weighs."

"Why certainly," agreed the old diamond-setter.

He wandered off into the dark room again and returned with weights and glasses. His elderly wife sat wrapped in her bathrobe, her arms crossed, her hands hugging her shoulders, and smiling sweetly at Mrs. Hammond, just as old Jenkins himself smiled. And just, Jennie noticed, as Mrs. Hammond was smiling, as if they were old friends, old, tried and trusted friends, and entirely oblivious of that young interloper, Jennie Allison.

How could any woman be so fatuous! Had Mrs. Hammond never heard of paste? Wasn't it likely that all

those diamonds that old Jenkins was spreading so recklessly over his Woolworth store tablecloth were merely paste—decoys to get her diamonds from her, while he substituted the false for the real?

Jennie became conscious that the old horror was grinning at her across the table.

"Have you ever," he asked, "looked at a diamond through a jeweler's glass?"

Jennie had to confess that she had missed that experience about which she was curious. One of Mrs. Hammond's earrings and the glass were shoved across the table to her. "You see," said the old man, "it is without a flaw."

Jennie screwed the glass to her eye and held the wonderful jewel tremulously in her hand. At first she could not believe she had the right focus, for it looked to her exactly like the glass knob on her bathroom door.

"This," said old Jenkins, "is an exactly similar white stone, although larger." He shoved one of those he had brought from the safe across the table.

Again Jennie thought she must be looking at the clean glass knob upon her bathroom door.

SHE shoved the diamonds and the glass back across the table.

There was something about the whole affair that kept her speechless, breathless, waiting—waiting, as she knew, for something ugly, desperate—that something ugly, hideous, that must surely happen when women are criminally careless with their wealth. Those stealthy footsteps, that slant-eyed youth had roused her unsuspected nerves. The gleam of the rich display upon the cheap table cover did not soothe them. And a bell, ringing suddenly through the apartment, did not help. In fact she started violently, and was furious to find that the sound had not annoyed anyone else, and that old Jenkins was smiling his awful golden smile at her.

"It is only my niece, Marjorie," he said. "She went to the movies after tea."

They called the evening meal "tea," and the old lady smiled in agreement with her husband, and got up and pressed the clicker and opened the hall door. She left it open, too, and returned to the diamond-cumbered table, and thereafter, while Mrs. Hammond speculated on settings and old Jenkins told stories of fabulous gems lost and found and fought and murdered for, the door swung idly on its creaking hinges, and no Marjorie appeared. It was left open so that their murderous accomplice could enter easily and swiftly—so that they might seem innocent, if all did not go well, as if an outsider had intruded upon the peaceful scene and robbed two innocent women and old Jenkins of his "diamonds" that now Jennie knew were fakes?

In the stress and strain of listening to that flapping door, Jennie's nerves seemed threatening to give way. Once she could have sworn a dim form slipped through the narrow opening and hid in the little entrance hall. But nothing happened, and discreet peering told her she must have been mistaken. But, as with all young things, action finally became a necessity and, having no other excuse, she sprang up toward the picture over the mantelpiece. Surely she might be excused for straightening it, and she must do something. Her shaky nerves demanded it.

But before she could reach the picture Mrs. Jenkins had smilingly preceded her.

"How stupid of me," she exclaimed, "not to realize that a crooked picture would annoy you! Let me straighten it. I'm not a very good housekeeper,

and I'm afraid you'd be covered with dust."

Forced back to her chair, Jennie immediately perceived that the picture was as crooked as ever. She had been prevented from straightening it by as diplomatic a move as any diplomat had ever made, yet why? What was the meaning of that crooked picture?

The banging door swung open and closed sharply. Jennie almost jumped to her feet, her hand on her heart. The accomplice had come at last. But as her eyes cleared she saw a sweet young girl, most obviously of the innocent flapper age and temperament.

"I stopped on the stoop to talk with Jim," the young girl simpered, and, although Jennie did not perceive this, a soft, reminiscent smile stole over Mrs. Hammond's features.

"All right," smiled her uncle, "run along to bed. Now then," he turned to Mrs. Hammond, "when you have decided, you can come down here and watch me set your diamonds, so you may be sure there is no substitution."

"That," said Mrs. Hammond, "is entirely unnecessary. Mrs. Cummings has perfect faith in you and so have I. I've known her husband's brother since we both played together on Thirteenth Street near Tenth. You know that old block, don't you?"

Jennie saw the diamonds gathered up, Jenkins restoring his to their paper packages, Mrs. Hammond restoring hers to her person, the earrings to her beaded bag.

She followed the wealthy moron from the room, amid the most cordial adieus, down the long, steep, badly lighted stairs, to what might lie beyond. They had escaped the diamond-setter but how about the slant-eyed man, undoubtedly waiting for them in the street?

"Let's," said Mrs. Hammond, "take a taxi. I'm tired."

Miraculously a taxi appeared and no slant-eyed man was lurking near. "Come home and spend the night with me," coaxed Mrs. Hammond. "I don't feel safe roaming around like this, with all these jewels, but you—you're so strong and brave and young, I feel all right with you. Come on."

"I'll go," accepted Jennie.

She sank into a corner of the taxi, glad that the ride would be short, almost unconscious of her hostess's continuing babble. But deeply, gladly, aware that so far they had escaped—Mrs. Hammond's diamonds and her youth. A miraculous escape, she thought, but not complete until they were safely locked behind the doors of Mrs. Hammond's Park Avenue apartment.

"Let us sip a cocktail and chat for a while," suggested Mrs. Hammond.

"I was awfully interested in your reactions tonight. I noticed how stunned you were by the presence of so many diamonds."

Jennie shook her head. "The diamonds did not stun me. They looked, through the glass, like so many glass doorknobs. It was your insouciance that stunned me. You, you know, sat just beneath that crooked picture."

"What of that?" demanded Mrs. Hammond.

"Oh, nothing," replied Jennie, "except that there was a pistol fastened to the back of the frame. If you had gone there alone——"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Hammond, and her skin was a sudden, unpleasant pallor, "and you jumped up to straighten it."

"And Mrs. Jenkins prevented me," added Jennie. "It was not until I jumped up to straighten it that I saw the weapon. A very clever device. What is more natural than for a man to exclaim, 'My wife has been dusting today,' and straighten the picture? A minute later the innocent person would be dead."

"True," said Mrs. Hammond, "but

the innocent old Jenkins and his wife would also be tried for murder. No, my angel, that pistol was not placed there for possible victims, but for possible thieves. And when you jumped up to straighten it, that was the only time my life was in danger, and Mrs. Jenkins saved me!"

"But how can you believe that?"

"Because," smiled Mrs. Hammond, "Mrs. Cummings told me something about the crooked picture. She said, 'Whatever you do, when you go into old Jenkins's place, don't offer to straighten his picture.' I didn't pay much attention to what she said, except that she rambled on about some device for protecting himself from possible crooks. But when you told me just now about the concealed pistol, then I knew. And I felt so safe, having *you* with me!"

The Mysterious Memorandum

A clergyman, about to begin to read prayers in his church, discovered a paper in his book, which he supposed to be the banns of some marriage. He opened it and found in a strange handwriting this message:

"John P. and James D. have murdered and robbed a traveling man, and buried him in the old Mill Orchard."

The parson was startled and hastily asked his clerk if he had placed any paper in the prayer book. The clerk declared he had not. The parson prudently concealed the contents of the paper, for the two accused in it were the clerk and the sexton of the church.

In some perplexity the parson went directly to a magistrate, and told him what had happened, but when he took the paper out of his pocket to show it, to his great amazement the writing had vanished from it. The magistrate now said that the parson must be on the verge of some mental disorder, and the matter of a message on what was plainly blank paper was a hallucination. The parson, however, insisted that he had made no mistake and prevailed on the magistrate to issue a warrant against the clerk and the sexton.

The two men were arrested and being confined separately told conflicting stories. The sexton said he had lodged a traveling man at his house, but that he had departed safely. The clerk said he had been that night at the sexton's but had seen no such man. Their houses were searched and goods such as might be carried by a salesman found, but both parties gave good reason for the possession of the goods.

No proof of crime could be found against them, till the parson recalled that the paper said the body was buried in the old Mill Orchard. The orchard was searched and the body brought to light.

On hearing this the sexton confessed his guilt, accusing the clerk as his accomplice, and both were sent to the gallows.

"Open and Shut"

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

By ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

CHAPTER I

BARNABY & PRATT—RETIRED

IN a little clearing at the head of the White Horse Gulch a log house braced its dark shape against the sweep of the wind, the beat of the rain. The great tops of the huge pines which stood on all four sides whipped and lashed in the gale. The dull, bark-covered logs dripped a steady stream of moisture. From within came the soft gleam of light, the brilliant illumination of a reading lamp, mingling with the ruddy flickering of a log fire. The beating rain turned to gold as the drops lashed past the lighted windows.

The interior of the cabin was lined with books. Rough shelves split from sugar pine, planed and painted, covered all four sides of the huge living-room. In a hand-made chair of unfinished pine, a chair which was nevertheless roomy and comfortable, Judge Barnaby sat with his feet to the fire, his finely chiseled profile bent over the pages of a volume of Supreme Court reports.

"I notice that the rules of evidence in criminal cases are becoming more and more relaxed, Mr. Pratt."

James C. Pratt straightened up from the pages of a current magazine.

"That's the result of all this talk about a wave of crime. They'll be wanting to convict 'em without even a trial pretty soon."

Judge Barnaby scowled, closed his book, and turned to his companion.

"Mr. Pratt, you are becoming somewhat careless in your choice of words, as well as in your logic. It has been ten years since we retired from the practice of law, and I have noticed that your facility of expression has become somewhat impaired."

The other grinned. Shorter, heavier set than his companion, he had a breeziness of manner, a friendly twinkle of the eye that made him appear less austere, made him seem more human, than Judge Barnaby. Neither man appeared to have aged since, upon a certain afternoon ten years ago, they had announced their retirement from the active practice of law. Judge Barnaby was dressed in whipcords which showed signs of much wear, but his sharp features were freshly shaven, his silver hair brushed carefully back from his high forehead, and his collar was immaculate.

James C. Pratt wore a leather coat upon the surface of which showed many a spot. His flannel shirt was open at the neck, and his face contained a stubble of gray beard.

"I guess I do get a little careless out here in the mountains, Judge. But, after all, that's what we came out here for, rest and relaxation. I like to just sort of let go and take things as they come.

A flicker of a scowl swept the smooth forehead of Judge Barnaby.

"That, Mr. Pratt, is a sign of advancing years. You are now past seventy, I am seventy-five. Being the older, I feel free to counsel you from time to time, and I warn you that carelessness in personal appearance is the forerunner of carelessness of thought."

IT was significant of the companionship of the two men that, while they were closer than brothers, they had never called each other by their first names. Throughout the years of law practice, during all of the time they had been virtual recluses in their mountain cabin, the two men addressed each other as "Judge Barnaby," and "Mr. Pratt." Things might have been different had the leadership been in Mr. Pratt, but the control of the joint destinies of the two men was in the steady hands of Judge Barnaby, as it had been during the years when Barnaby & Pratt had been the leading factor at the Greenfield bar.

"What is more," continued Judge Barnaby, speaking in his firm, precise tones, "we did not come here to relax but to obtain leisure for the pursuit of our studies, to recuperate from the long years spent in the confinement of offices. You know, Mr. Pratt, that we are not exactly young men. We are not old as yet, but we are getting into the latter portion of the prime of life. We must take steps to conserve our health if we are to keep our minds free to absorb knowledge."

The junior member of the firm grinned. He worshipped the ground his partner walked upon, and yet he recognized the peculiarities of the old man. James C. Pratt never referred to his companion aloud other than as "Judge Barnaby," but in the innermost recesses of his mind he delighted to refer to him as "the old man."

Judge Barnaby would never recognize the fact that he was descending into the twilight of life. Spare and sound of body, keen and clear of mind, precise of thought, he took mental inventory and still classified himself as in the prime of life. Others might grow old, but not he. The world was growing younger; he was not growing older. Young men were daily crowding into the important positions of life, but that was the way of the world, the changing trend of the times. A man's judgment was not ripe, in the opinion of Judge Barnaby, before he passed his seventieth milestone. Physically and mentally the judge was more vigorous than when he had quit the courtroom ten years ago. The outdoor life, the relief from weighty responsibilities, the opportunities for study, and the sincerity of his belief in his own perpetual youth, had preserved him wonderfully against the ravages of time.

"You know, if I didn't know you as I do, I'd think you were devoid of all human emotions," responded Mr. Pratt, apropos more of his innermost thoughts than of the trend of the conversation.

Judge Barnaby gravely turned over the comment in his mind.

"That would not imply a criticism, necessarily. Human emotions are but the escape of surplus nervous energy. After all the strongest man is the one who can control his emotional impulses, conserving the nervous force for mental nourishment. Grief is merely a state of nervous unbalance over the memory of some-

thing which has happened. Joy is a state of premature gratification over some event of the past. As far as that is concerned, both grief and joy are premature. The effect of time is to neutralize all emotions. Time heals the wounds of grief, and the temporary exaltation of joy is always overcome by some future irritant of grief."

Mr. Pratt nodded.

"I believe you are superior to the emotions—which doesn't mean you haven't a big heart."

Judge Barnaby gravely inclined his snowy head.

"Generosity, when it does not go to the extent of weakening the character of the recipient of the generous act, is a builder of character, a worthy attribute of strength. Surely, Mr. Pratt, that cannot be someone approaching on such a night as this."

Both men listened intently. Above the shriek of the wind, the beating of branches, the sweep of the rain, there came a faint call, a human voice pitting its puny strength against the noise of the tempest.

The men exchanged glances, then James Pratt arose and went toward the door. By the time he removed the heavy, oaken bar there sounded staggering steps upon the muddy ground without, the round of blows upon the thick logs, and, as the door swung back, the wind literally blew a dripping figure into the room.

The newcomer was a mere boy, some twenty-three or -four, white, exhausted, wet. He stood under the light, facing the fire, his dazed eyes seeking to adjust themselves to the light of the room; rain-water dripped in little, trickling rivulets from his sodden clothes.

"I beg your pardon," he began formally, and then toppled forward into Mr. Pratt's arms.

CHAPTER II

JOHN SMITH

THE two old men put their visitor to bed, rubbed his cold skin, forced some hot broth between his lips, and did not leave him until the faint of exhaustion had given place to the steady breathing of sound sleep.

"Completely exhausted," opined Mr. Pratt. "It's funny where he could have come from. He wouldn't have started out in this storm, and he hasn't been camping—not in those clothes. He must have come all the way from Black Canyon since morning. Probably got out of an automobile and got lost in the storm."

Judge Barnaby nodded.

"I agree with you that his advent is unusual, but we should not speculate upon his private affairs. Suffice it that we are so located that we can furnish him the rest and shelter which were doubtless necessary to save his life.

"I believe we were discussing the modern criminal procedure when we digressed into other conversational channels. Let us return to the fire and resume our discussion. I am alarmed to note a growing apathy toward personal liberty, coupled with a looseness of thought. I read a few days ago that our criminal code should be abrogated because it was adopted in the main in 1872. The writer of that article overlooked the fact that our national constitution was adopted in 1789, and the Magna Charter was signed in 1215, yet both remain the immutable bulwarks of our personal rights."

James Pratt pounded the table.

"You're right, Judge Barnaby. I have noticed in the trend of the recent appellate decisions a most deplorable tendency to relax the rules of procedure. By George! the conviction of an innocent man is a

greater miscarriage of justice than the release of a hundred guilty man. A wave of crime can never be stopped by relaxing our personal rights thereby making convictions easier. As a matter of fact you can't enforce laws, anyway. Laws have got to be respected and obeyed, and it's the half-baked foolishness of modern regulatory legislation that has resulted in the universal disrespect of law."

Judge Barnaby held up his hand.

"Come, come, Mr. Pratt. Your logic is sound, but the emotion with which you state it is unbecoming to a lawyer of your experience and years. There is no call for the expenditure of such a great amount of nervous energy. You are a comparatively young man yet, but I regret to think of what will happen when you have passed the prime of life if you do not learn to control your emotions."

Mr. Pratt grinned.

He was under no illusions concerning his age. It was all very well for the "old man" to refuse to recognize the advance of age, but seventy years was seventy years—and as for seventy-five, well, that was five years away.

THE following morning dawned with that fresh washed fragrance of the air which is the recompense for storm. The giant pines reared their green crests against the black blue of the cloudless sky. The golden sunshine flooded over the cabin and threw forth sparkling fire from the drops which still clung to the low brush.

The young man who had blundered up the pass through the storm the night before, stirred slightly in his sleep, opened his eyes languidly, and suddenly gave a start, sitting bolt upright, his face drawn and haggard, eyes wide.

Mr. Pratt heard the creaking of the bedspring and stepped to the door.

"Good morning, youngster. You sure had one trip last night. Just lie abed and take it easy. I'll bring you a cup o' coffee in a few minutes. Feelin' better-"

The young man nodded, his eyes still wide and startled.

"Don't bother with the coffee, thanks, I'll get up."

He was as good as his word, and came into the little kitchen, where the two old men were getting the breakfast, within ten minutes from the time Mr. Pratt had spoken. His wet clothes were drying before the fire in the living-room, while he had arrayed himself in some clothes of Mr. Pratt's which the lawyer had placed upon a chair near the bed.

"Your clothes are a bit generous for me," the visitor said with a smile," but I guess mine'll be ready in a jiffy. That fire'll dry 'em out in no time. I'm sure sorry I flopped on you last night, but I was just all in, an' then some. I left my friends in the Black Canyon yesterday morning and started to hike across country to Red Rock, and must have got lost. Then it commenced to rain and I just stumbled around the country until I saw your light when I was ready to drop in my tracks."

Judge Barnaby nodded, gravely.

Mr. Pratt peered sharply at his visitor, the manner he used to assume when cross-examining a witness.

"The Black Canyon's been closed to automobile traffic for the last week," he stated, sharply, professionally.

"Mr. Pratt," sharply rebuked Judge Barnaby, "please don't annoy our guest with questions. That's the worst of you youngsters."

The guest flushed, dropped his eyes and muttered hastily.

"We got through on a detour. My name's Smith, John Smith, from Red Rock. I'll be on my way soon, and thanks, ever so much."

Judge Barnaby gravely acknowledged the introduction.

"It is a pleasure, Mr. Smith. My companion is Mr. Pratt, and my own name is Barnaby. We will be pleased to make you welcome until you have fully recovered from the effects of your exposure. Pray make yourself right at home. Be seated, sir, and partake of some of this coffee."

The young man did not offer to shake hands, but hurriedly attacked the fried bacon and hot cakes which Mr. Pratt placed before him.

Following the meal Judge Barnaby gave his associate a meaning glance and addressed himself to his visitor.

"I trust that you will make yourself at home, Mr. Smith. After your experience of yesterday I would suggest that you rest a day or two before resuming your journey. You will find that we have all of the conveniences here although we have few of the luxuries of life. Just make yourself comfortable, and do not mind if we appear indifferent. I am engaged in the writing of a paper which requires considerable research, and, if you will excuse me, I will repair to my library. Mr. Pratt, I wonder if you would mind assisting me for a few hours."

THE two lawyers went into the book-lined room, where Judge Barnaby resolutely turned the conversation from Mr. Pratt's veiled comments upon their visitor, and into the channel of legal technicalities upon which he was preparing a paper for one of the law journals.

It was a subject upon which Judge Barnaby and Mr. Pratt were not in entire accord, and the hours passed unnoticed while the two lawyers, with unlimited time at their command, wrestled with the collection of cases upon the subject, argued varying points and criticized the indefinite language of the leading case on the subject.

The door of the kitchen opened.

"Are you gentlemen ready for lunch?"

The lawyers looked up in surprise. Their visitor had donned his own garments, washed the dishes, set the table, and prepared lunch. More than that, he had split and carried in large quantities of wood.

In gratified silence the hosts filed in and partook of the meal their guest had prepared. Particularly did Judge Barnaby look at the woodpile. The young man had split up and carried in more wood in a morning than the two recluses could have handled in two days.

When the judge finished he leaned back on the bench, fastening Mr. Pratt with his sharp eyes, and began:

"Now take that dissenting opinion by Judge South, Mr. Pratt."

The young man stepped forward and began to clear off the table. Mr. Pratt arose and led the way to the other room.

"I'll just show you something about that dissenting opinion," he declared as the door slammed. Judge South was a personal friend of Mr. Pratt's, anyway, and as far as Mr. Pratt was concerned, the dissenting opinion of Judge South was of far greater value than the majority opinion.

That afternoon the clouds piled up in the south in great masses, rolled up the mountain pass with incredible speed, and great drops of rain began to patter on the roof.

Mr. Pratt looked up.

"Gosh, it's raining again. Say, we mustn't let that young Smith get out in the rain. Wonder where he is."

Mr. Pratt stepped into the kitchen. The room was in order, the dishes all clean and shining, floor swept and table scrubbed, but his young guest was not to be seen. The lawyer stepped to the back-door, and then

saw the visitor staggering up under a heavy load of wood.

"Thought I'd better get in some wood for you fellows," he remarked. "I wouldn't wonder if we had a regular storm this time."

Mr. Pratt looked at the clouds and nodded.

"Guess you're right. Don't try to leave in this rain, and you don't have to do all this work, you know. The judge and I appreciate it, but you mustn't make such a slave out of yourself."

Smith threw down the wood, wiped the raindrops from his face and grinned, a healthy, boyish grin.

"Say, I wouldn't leave you two old men here alone, with this storm coming up, for anything."

Mr. Pratt flushed.

"Look here, my boy, don't ever do that again."

Smith's eyes grew puzzled.

"Do what?"

"Call us old men. I'm a mere youth in the eyes of Judge Barnaby, and he's just getting in the prime of life. Don't ever let him hear you call him an old man or it would break his heart."

There was a twinkle in Mr. Pratt's eye as he spoke.

"Of course, son, I'm no spring chicken, and I know it. But Judge Barnaby never will recognize the fact that he's aging. And darned if I can see that he is. He's as vigorous now as he was twenty years ago. Anyway, remember that the rest of the world may be gradually growing younger, but Judge Barnaby is still in the prime of life."

The boy grinned.

"Yes, sir, beg your pardon, sir."

THAT marked the begining of a strange relationship. The young man hung on at the cabin, doing the cooking and scrubbing, wood-chopping, keeping in the kitchen or the back of the house, while the two lawyers, left to themselves, gravitated toward their books, writing, studying, arguing to their heart's content.

Judge Barnaby seemed to take the arrangement for granted. His mind seemed able to grasp the subtle legal points which he delighted to study. All practical matters such as the cooking of food, bringing in of wood, and even eating, were merely things which interrupted his mental concentration, and he went about such matters in an absent-minded, mechanical way, his thoughts dwelling upon some complicated legal situation while his hands automatically performed the tasks incident to life in a mountain cabin. Now that the young man had taken over all of the menial work, Judge Barnaby never seemed to give the matter a thought. There was nothing to interrupt him from his studies except the necessity of eating, and he did that mechanically, perfunctorily.

Mr. Pratt took more notice of the situation, studied the young man keenly, made guarded suggestions that his folk would be missing him, and then finally settled down into the delightful routine of being able to disregard all of the physical duties of life and engage in unlimited reading, writing, and argument. The two old cronies put in every waking moment mulling over their books, arguing the effect of varying laws, wrangling over the interpretation of judicial decisions.

And then one afternoon there sounded heavy steps without and there came a peremptory knocking on the log door.

Mr. Pratt scowled. More visitors! He and Judge Barnaby had secured this isolated cabin for the purpose of getting away from the world and its interruptions. Naturally studiously inclined, they were never so happy as when left alone to pursue their read-

ing and their interminable arguments concerning Judge South's dissenting opinions. Interruptions disturbed the even tenor of their ways.

He threw open the door.

A short, heavy-set man with heavy brows, thick lips, bull neck and protruding jaw stood on the threshold.

CHAPTER III

AFTER FORTY ODD YEARS

"WHO'RE you?" he asked Mr. Pratt with a manner of arrogant authority.

"None of your business," promptly retorted the lawyer and slammed the door.

Immediately the heavy-set man thrust his shoulder against the door, gave a heave and pushed the struggling form of the other back across the floor.

"None o' your lip, old man," he snorted as he thrust his heavy, seamed face through the crack of the open door. "I'm the sheriff o' Greenfield down in Mesa County, an' I'm on official business. Open up!"

Judge Barnaby laid down his book, his face lit with curiosity, his eyes gleaming with what was almost a hunger.

"Come in, come in," he called, "I'm indeed pleased to meet the sheriff of Greenfield. I—er—I lived there for some considerable portion of my life."

The sheriff entered and looked searchingly at the two men.

"Yuh did, eh? What was the name?"

Judge Barnaby straightened visibly.

"Mr. Charles M. Barnaby, and my associate there is Mr. James C. Pratt."

Both men waited, watching the face of their visitor.

He puckered his brows.

"Never heard of yuh," he said at length. "Funny, too, I been there for nine years."

Cold, disappointed dignity was in Judge Barnaby's voice.

"Surely you have heard of the firm of Barnaby & Pratt."

The sheriff shook his head. "Nope. There's been a lot o' development there in Greenfield. They struck some oil a mile or so out of town, and she's five or six times as big as she was ten years ago. The whole county's growed. I was an oil man myself. That's how come I got the political job I wanted. The oil boys all hang together."

Judge Barnaby laid down his book.

"Who is district attorney now?"

"Feller by the name of Lowry. Sort of an old stick, but a pretty good sort of a codger. We get along all right. We'd better. Whenever I get a case I've got it right. All he has to do is to call my witnesses, an' the jury does the rest."

"Who's doing the criminal law-defending the men who are arrested?" asked Mr. Pratt. "Is there some firm that is particularly clever at that now, perhaps making a specialty of it?"

THE sheriff shook his head.

"Nope, there ain't much doing on that line any more. There ain't much money in it in the first place, and then it don't do 'em no good, anyhow. When we catch 'em nowdays they'd better plead guilty an' get it over with. Or sometimes they get a shyster up from the city, but a lawyer that's worth his salt handles big business stuff and don't monkey with a lot o' crooks."

Judge Barnaby's voice quivered.

"The defense of an innocent man is the highest work of an attorney," he stated. "Even where a man is

guilty it is the solemn duty of the bar to see that the proof is introduced regularly."

The sheriff shook his head.

"Nope. Take it from me, I've been sheriff of the county for six years, an' I've seen all sorts of lawyers. The guy that makes his livin' defendin' crooks is a crook. Say, have you seen any strangers up in these parts lately?"

Judge Barnaby shook his head in cold, silent dignity.

Mr. Pratt sought to terminate the unwelcome interview.

"There is no one, sir. That is, there is one visitor we have with us, a Mr. Smith. He came here some two weeks ago. Aside from that there is no one."

The sheriff stiffened slightly.

"What sort of a looking bird is this man Smith, an' where is he now?"

"You'll probably find him in the woodshed tinkering with our automobile," replied Mr. Pratt testily. "There your trained eyes can probably grasp the details of his appearance with much less effort than I can describe them to you."

The sheriff shot Mr. Pratt a swift glance.

"Got a machine, huh? Ain't it pretty hard to get in an' out up here in the winter? What are you birds doin' up in this out-of-the-way place? What's your business?"

Judge Barnaby answered:

"We have a machine to get back and forth with provisions, but we do not ordinarily use it during the winter, sir. Mr. Smith has volunteered to do something to the mechanism that will result in more power, something connected with the removal of carbon from the valves. And as for our business here, sir, you have described the matter with more exactitude than is usually found in the description of a peace officer—it is our business here, just as you mentioned, *our* business."

The sheriff arose.

"I'll take a look at this bird, and then I'll talk with you some more."

With that he went through the back of the cabin, pausing to make a leisurely survey of the entire house before he banged the back door and pounded over toward the log-wood shed and combination garage.

MR. PRATT voiced his disgust.

"Remember Sheriff Menefee, Judge? He was the sheriff in office when we left, and very much of a gentleman. I fear that the influx of population to Mesa County has not perhaps been for the best interests of the county."

Judge Barnaby did not answer the question directly.

"It is surprising how the niche a man carves for himself in the world becomes forgotten as soon as he steps out. To think, Mr. Pratt, that a sheriff of Mesa County, residing in Greenfield, would not know of the firm of Barnaby & Pratt. You would surely think that our forty-odd years of practice there would entitle us to some permanent place in the memory of the bar. I wonder if Mr. Lowry would remember us. You know, it's rather strange that we have never been back to Greenfield since the day we retired."

Mr. Pratt nodded.

For a moment there was silence while the two lawyers sat, thinking over the past. Then there again came the sound of steps and the sheriff appeared in the doorway, leading the young man.

"Probably didn't know you had a murderer here? Or maybe you did. Smith, eh? His real name's Sanderson, and he's wanted for the murder of old Phil Enright."

Mr. Pratt jumped to his feet.

"What! Wanted for murder. Phil

Enright—why, I knew of Enright, a very prominent man."

The sheriff nodded.

"I'm takin' him right on back to the county seat. You old codgers better let me give yuh a word of advice. Be a little more careful about lettin' people hide up here with yuh. I'm being mighty easy with you two birds, or I'd run you on in, too."

Judge Barnaby sat very erect.

"Is your name Sanderson?" he asked the boy.

His erstwhile guest nodded.

"I'm not guilty of any murder, sir. I didn't even know Mr. Enright was dead."

"Have you any money to employ counsel?"

The youth shook his head.

"Not a penny."

Judge Barnaby glanced at his associate. Within the deep eyes there glowed the light of battle. For a long moment Mr. Pratt met that gaze, then his own face lit up and his shoulders squared.

"Come on," commanded the sheriff, giving a tug upon his prisoner's arm. "I'm goin' to get you back before midnight, an' remember I ain't takin' no chances."

Judge Barnaby straightened.

"Please allow me to speak to your prisoner a moment."

The sheriff glared suspiciously.

"Like fun I will. One more crack like that and I'll take both of you in as accomplices after the fact. Come on, Sanderson."

CHAPTER IV

"PUT ON YOUR CASE"

"PEOPLE vs. Sanderson," called the clerk of the court.

"Norman Sanderson," came the incisive voice of the judge, "you are accused of murder, the murder of Philip Enright, a human being, contrary to the form, force and effects of the statutes in such case made and provided, and against the peace and dignity of the people of the state of California. Have you counsel to represent you?"

"May it please the court——"

The words came from an old man attired in a very shiny blue serge suit cut after the fashion of bygone years, an old man who stood very straight and erect.

The judge turned his gaze.

"I appear for the defendant," continued the old man. "Myself and my associate, Mr. Pratt. You may enter the firm of Barnaby & Pratt as counsel for the defense, and proceed with the arraignment."

In the moment's silence which followed a heavy-set man spun around in his swivel chair. L. A. Lowry, district attorney, drew a flabby hand across his brow and rubbed his eyes.

"Well, I'll be hanged," he muttered.

The judge looked puzzled.

"You are admitted to the bar, Mr. Barnaby?"

Lowry arose hurriedly and ponderously to his feet.

"I can vouch for the gentleman," he stated. "Proceed with the arraignment."

When the arraignment had been concluded and the defendant's plea of not guilty entered, L. A. Lowry devoted his attention to some other pressing matters which were on the court's calendar, and then turned toward the chair which had been occupied by Judge Barnaby.

To his surprise the old gentleman was gone.

The district attorney puckered his forehead in a puzzled frown. Now well past fifty, the years had not been kind to L. A. Lowry. His glassy eyes, blotched skin and drooping mouth testified to his poor physical condition, while his quiver-

ing hand bore mute evidence of nervousness. Yet there was a certain air of ponderous power about him, a steam-roller dignity.

He inclined his ponderous neck toward his deputy.

"See the old bird that answered for Sanderson? That firm used to be some pumpkins here ten or fifteen years ago. They used to worry me when I was younger. A funny team, they always managed to upset a case somehow. You never could get a case to run on schedule when they were on the other side. Funny, Barnaby doesn't look a day older than when he quit, ten or twelve years ago, but he's gettin' old. Must've had hard luck. Did you see the old boy's suit? Well, well, it's a queer world."

The deputy grinned, the grin of confident youth looking down upon the frailities of age.

"Well, they won't upset the applecart in *this case*. We got this Sanderson bird dead to rights. It's an open-and-shut case."

Lowry nodded, easily, confidently. "Sure we got him. Shucks, those old birds couldn't rattle me now! They used to pick on me when I was green at the job, but then, somehow, juries were different in those days."

THERE the matter ended. Sanderson was returned to his cell, L. A. Lowry waddled back to his office, and the case of People vs. Sanderson dropped into the routine progress of untried felony cases. Nor did L. A. Lowry see counsel for the defendant again until the date of the trial when Judge Barnaby and his associate, James C. Pratt, each attired in a suit of shiny blue serge, filed into the courtroom, nodded to the defendant and took their places at the table reserved for defendant's counsel.

The getting of the jury took but little time. Countrary to all established rules of procedure, Judge Barnaby seemed to take but little interest in the selection of the jury. Any one who could qualify apparently satisfied him.

L. A. Lowry fidgeted uneasily. Somewhere in the dim recesses of his memory he had the impression that this was one of Judge Barnaby's exasperating tricks. He would appear utterly indifferent to important phases of the trial, and then suddenly become vitally interested in some trivial matter of testimony, and somehow that trivial matter seemed suddenly to loom large by comparison.

L. A. Lowry took a deep breath and began to watch the progress of the case with care. It would never do for him to lose a case to these two old codgers. He had handled the entire matter so the defendant knew but little of the damning facts which were arrayed against him. There had been no preliminary, but an indictment by the grand jury had been the foundation for the information, and the witnesses had been entirely under the control of the district attorney's office, and instructed not to talk.

Almost before the district attorney was aware of the fact, the jury had been selected, and were standing to be sworn to try the case.

Lowry heaved to his feet and launched into his opening statement. For some reason he trimmed this opening statement to the fewest possible words. He had intended to make something of a speech, but there was a subtle challenge in the steely eyes of old Judge Barnaby that made him choose his words with care, and confine his statement to bare facts.

He would prove that Norman Sanderson was a protégé of Phil Enright. That the decedent had made

his will in favor of the defendant, Sanderson; that Philip Enright, the murdered man, was very wealthy, that he was without any close relatives, Carl Linscott, a young man but little older than the defendant, being a distant relative, and having recently come to live with the decedent and the defendant.

That on the twenty-fifth of September, 1925, the three of them, Linscott, the defendant, and the deceased, were living together in the large home of the victim. That there was a housekeeper and two servants also living in the house.

That on the evening of September twenty-fifth the defendant and the deceased engaged in a violent quarrel over the prospective wife of the defendant. That the old man, the decedent, had stated he would alter the terms of his will at once, and had then retired to his bedroom. That, that evening, Carl Linscott had gone to a masquerade ball, that the defendant had announced he would retire, and that the servants had gone to their rooms in the back of the house. That the defendant had not in fact retired, but that he had surreptitiously left the house.

That Philip Enright had been found dead in bed, his death having taken place about midnight and being caused by a knife wound. That the knife had been found in a closet in Norman Sanderson's room, a bread knife, covered with human blood, and bearing finger prints of Norman Sanderson, the defendant.

That upon returning from the ball at about three A. M., Carl Linscott had looked in at the door of the aged victim's bedroom and had discovered the crime. That a search revealed that the defendant was not in the house, that he had left about midnight or shortly thereafter and had taken an assumed name and was found several days later hiding in the mountains, living under such an assumed name.

"In short, gentlemen of the jury," concluded the district attorney, "we will show you an open-and-shut case of murder in the first degree, and upon such evidence demand the death penalty at your hands."

He bowed and sat down, watching the erect form of Judge Barnaby anxiously. There was something about that stern, silent figure that made the district attorney uneasy, seemed, somehow, to put him on the defensive.

There was a silence, while the jury glanced curiously at the defendant, the young man whose life rested in their hands. There was a shuffling sound from the benches, the steady, monotonous click-clack of the clock.

"Do you care to make a statement?" snapped Lowry.

Judge Barnaby did not even deign to notice the inquiry. It was his subordinate, Mr. Pratt, who answered the question without even turning his head.

"Put on your case," he said, shortly.

CHAPTER V

EXHIBIT A

LOWRY flushed and called his first witness.

Dr. R. E. Ranger testified as to his qualifications, his admission to practice medicine, admitted he knew Mr. Philip Enright well, had treated him as a patient, had been called to the house on the early morning of September twenty-sixth, that Philip Enright was dead, that he had been killed by a stab inflicted with a long-bladed sharp instrument, that death had taken place at about the hour of midnight, that the deceased was propped up in bed, a book in his hand, his eyes open, that there were no signs of struggle,

that death had been instantaneous, that he knew of his own knowlelge that the deceased frequently propped himself up in bed and read during a large portion of the night. The deceased had some form of insomnia which accounted for the habit.

L. A. Lowry waved his pudgy hand toward counsel for the defendant.

"Your witness."

Judge Barnaby sat toying with a pencil while the clock clacked off the seconds. Mr. Pratt leaned forward and whispered briefly to his senior partner. The other nodded, then resumed his playing with the pencil.

"Doctor Ranger," the words clipped from Judge Barnaby's tongue as though cut with a knife, "you say there was no evidence of a struggle."

"No, sir."

"And, in your opinion, the deceased was awake at the time he met his death."

"Yes, sir."

"Then, Doctor Ranger, it would seem that the deceased was sufficiently well acquainted with the murderer to make no struggle when he saw the murderer approaching the bed. That the victim did not even put down his book at the approach of the criminal."

Doctor Ranger drew a sharp breath and looked at the district attorney.

The glassy eyes met his in a leer of triumph. If Judge Barnaby wanted to ask the questions that would hang his own client it was not up to the district attorney to object.

"I suppose so," admitted the doctor after a pause.

Judge Barnaby waved the witness from the chair.

L. A. LOWRY arose from his seat and turned his ponderous presence toward the jury as he called the next witness—a habit of his when a case was going to suit him.

"Call Mrs. Anna Graves."

Mrs. Graves was a woman of about fifty, sharp-faced, keen-eyed, bony-jawed. She rattled off her answers with sufficient speed to cause the court reporter to settle at his desk and spread his elbows.

Yes, she was the housekeeper for Mr. Philip Enright, and had been for years. Of course she knew the defendant, he had lived there in the house; yes; on the evening of September twenty-fifth she had heard loud voices in the living-room and had listened; yes, she had listened at the door; no, it was not a habit, but on this occasion the voices were so loud that she determined to ascertain what it was all about.

Mr. Philip Enright was "laying down the law" to the defendant. He insisted that the boy should seek the hand of a certain young lady in marriage. Mr. Sanderson, it seemed, had other plans, and the two men argued at much length. Finally Mr. Enright had stated that he was not going to support an ingrate and that unless Mr. Sanderson came to him before midnight with the promise to follow his wishes in the matter that Mr. Sanderson would be left out of Mr. Enright's will.

Yes, the deceased seemed to be in something of a temper, and so did the defendant. Both men were very angry. At that time the servants were in the back of the house and only Mr. Enright and the defendant were in the front.

Young Mr. Linscott was upstairs somewhere dressing for a masquerade ball. He was dressed as a clown. Yes, she saw him when he went out. It was about fifteen minutes after the discussion she had testified to. Yes, Mr. Sanderson, the defendant, seemed angry, but no more than the

decedent. Both men were *very* angry. Mr Sanderson had said he'd starve before he touched a cent of Mr. Enright's dirty money, and Mr. Enright said he wouldn't support an ingrate and that he'd change his will.

From then on the witness wandered far afield, continually seeking to add her impressions, her statements to the other servants the next morning, how she felt when she saw the body, and similar comments.

L. A. Lowry headed her off as much as possible. The judge of the court interposed a comment here and there, but Barnaby & Pratt, attorneys for the defendant, made no comments, no objections, no motions to strike.

In the middle of some rattle-tongued comment of the woman Lowry held up his hand.

"That's all, that's all, as far as I am concerned, Mrs. Graves. You may cross-examine Judge Barnaby."

The erect figure inclined his head slightly.

"I have no questions."

"Witness excused," snapped the court.

THERE was a rustle about the benches of the courtroom. Here was a funny murder case. The lawyers didn't seem to know what they were doing. They hadn't done a thing except ask one or two questions which had made things that much worse for their client.

Lowry sat in his chair, his forehead resting on his hand, glassy eyes staring unseeingly at some papers on his desk. Somewhere within him there stirred a vague uneasiness, a subtle psychic disturbance that somehow seemed to demand attention, and yet there never had been a more clear case—"dead open and shut," he muttered under his breath, but the tactics of his opponents worried him. Somehow, he remembered, a case never did seem to run according to schedule when Barnaby & Pratt were on the other side.

"Call the sheriff," he barked, suddenly realizing that he had been taking more time than he should have in between witnesses. It would never do for the jury to think he was worried.

The sheriff took the stand, leered at the attorneys for the defense, smiled at the jury, threw back his chest, basked in the limelight of public attention and told of his pursuit of the defendant, of finding him living under an assumed name in the mountains, in the cabin of the "two old gentlemen over there," told of finding a bloody knife in the closet of the room occupied by the defendant while he was living in the decedent's house, described the knife and the location.

"Yes, sir, hidden under some old clothes it was, sir."

The district attorney produced a glass case in which reposed a knife, dark with blood.

"Would the witness recognize the knife he had found?"

Oh, yes, that was the knife. It had been found in just that condition. There was a finger-print on the handle that had been "developed" by the finger-print expert. Aside from that it was exactly as it had been found in the closet.

Lowry arose to his feet, turned toward the defense counsel and thundered forth as a challenge:

"Cross-examine the witness, sir!"

Judge Barnaby answered the challenge without the fraction of a second's hesitation.

"No questions."

The sheriff reluctantly left the stand. It was hard lines for a good officer not to have the opportunity to match wits with a cross-examining attorney. He would have liked to

show the crowd just how he could have twisted those old has-beens around if they had tried to cross-examine *him*. It was obvious that he hoped the counsel would change their minds and decide to ask him a question or two after all, for he slowly disengaged himself from the witness chair, looking hopefully the while at Judge Barnaby.

The old campaigner did not meet his gaze. His eyes were fastened upon some papers on his desk.

Then the sheriff inflated his chest. His attitude changed to a "they-didn't-dare-cross-examine-*me*" manner as he strutted past the jury and back to his seat.

"Call Herbert McElvey," snapped L. A. Lowry, running his fingers through his scanty hair.

A DAPPER man stepped smilingly forward, took the oath, bowed ingratiatingly, smiled at the court, nodded to the district attorney, took the witness chair, bowed to the jury, crossed his knees, took a deep breath and glanced expectantly at L. A. Lowry.

"State your name and occupation."

"Herbert McElvey. I am a finger-print expert of some fifteen years experience."

A ripple ran over the courtroom as people strained their ears. At last the case was going to bring forth fireworks. The sheriff had said there was a finger-print on that knife.

Lowry glanced confidently at the jury, toyed with his watch fob, and carefully brought out Mr. McElvey's qualifications.

The witness had been a student of finger-prints since nineteen-eleven, had read all the standard text-books, had testified in innumerable cases, was familiar with all the tests of identification usually used by expert finger-print specialists. Yes, he had seen the knife marked for identification as "Exhibit A." There was a finger-print on that knife. Yes, he had dusted the surface with black powder, and had photographed the finger-print which had been brought to light by the powder. Yes, he had that photograph with him, an enlargement, if the court pleased. Certainly he would produce it.

He reached in his inside pocket and brought forth a five-by-seven photograph of a series of broken lines.

Triumphantly Lowry introduced the photograph as "Exhibit B." There was no objection from Barnaby & Pratt.

Lowry turned again to the witness. Had he ever examined the finger-prints of the accused? The witness had. He had compared the finger-prints with the finger-prints on the photograph, Exhibit B. He had found that the middle finger on the right hand of the accused contained a whorl formation similar to the print on the photograph, Exhibit B. He had then checked the points of identity, and had found no fewer than eleven points. Three were frequently considered sufficient to prove identity. In this case the print was comparatively perfect, and there were eleven points of identity.

Lowry nodded, turned to the jury with an "I-told-you-so-gentlemen" expression, fastened his glassy eyes on the counsel for the defense with a gaze that seemed somehow to be accusing, and waited for a long moment.

"Will you care to cross-examine *this* witness?"

Judge Barnaby looked up from his papers as though surprised.

"Are you entirely finished with your direct examination, Mr. District Attorney?"

Lowry sat down.

"Cross-examine!" he snapped.

The witness settled himself a little more securely in his chair, seemed to be bracing himself for a battle of wits, smiled once more at the jury and inclined his head toward Judge Barnaby.

"There was no evidence of blood on this finger-print?" asked the Judge.

The expert smiled.

"That would not be expected at all. The right hand would be grasping the handle of the knife, and the blood would spurt over the outside of the hand. The finger would be pressing against the handle of the knife——"

The words shot out with the rapidity of a machine gun, and Lowry ducked his head to hide a smile of triumph. McElvey was the most deadly man in the business to cross-examine. He was trained to answer every question to the discomfiture of his cross-examiner. Times had changed since old Judge Barnaby handled a case.

"Answer my question yes or no!" snapped Judge Barnaby in a tone of such deadly intensity that the words died away on the lips of the witness. But the damage had been done. The point had been well brought home, and people turned to each other, smiled and nodded. Of course the finger would be pressing against the knife handle and the blood would be on the outside of the finger, not on the inside.

The witness smiled deprecatingly.

"Pardon me, sir, perhaps I did not understand the question."

The reporter read the question.

"Yes, or no!" snapped Judge Barnaby.

"No," smiled the witness, then added, still smiling, "for the reason that I have already explained.

Again Lowry ducked his head, again there was a ripple throughout the courtroom, a slight titter here and there. This young man certainly knew his business.

Judge Barnaby waved his hand.

"That is all."

CHAPTER VI

FROM BAD TO WORSE

LOWRY was grinning now, a triumphant grin. Judge Barnaby might have been a heavy weight in the legal game once, but he was a has-been now. Those two witnesses he had cross-examined certainly had killed his chances with the jury. The crowd was turning against the old man, too. Lowry could feel it.

"Call Samuel T. Selby, president of the First National Bank," purred Mr. Lowry, his face radiating self-confidence.

Mr. Selby was sworn, a thin wisp of a man with the skin of a mummy and the eyes of a gimlet.

Yes, he had been acquainted with Mr. Philip Enright in his lifetime. Yes, he was the executor of Mr. Enright's last will, and also was its custodian. Yes, on the evening of the twenty-fifth of September, 1925, Mr. Enright had called on the telephone and said he wanted to change the terms of his will the next day. No, he had not done so. The next day he was dead.

Yes, he had the will. Under the terms of that will one hundred thousand dollars went to Norman Sanderson, the defendant in the case, that was virtually all of the estate, the residuary clause was in favor of Carl Linscott. Yes, he knew the extent and value of the estate of the deceased, also knew the relationship of the parties. The defendant was not a blood relation, but had lived with the deceased for years, being treated as a son.

Carl Linscott was a distant relative who had been living in the house some three or four months. He was merely there on a visit. Yes, the specific bequest to the defendant would take virtually all of the estate. The residue would not be more than one or two thousand dollars.

Lowry turned confidently to Judge Barnaby.

"Any questions?"

The judge shook his head.

"No questions—not of this witness, Mr. Lowry, but I find there was one question I should have asked Mrs. Graves, the housekeeper; might I ask the permission of court and counsel to re-call her for a very brief cross-examination?"

L. A. Lowry bowed stiffly, his glassy eyes twinkling with ponderous humor.

"Certainly, Judge Barnaby. I *thought* you were a little too brief with some of your cross-examinations in the case."

There was a burst of laughter from the benches, and the bailiff banged his gavel upon the desk, but it was to be noticed that even the trial judge, his honor on the bench, had suppressed a swift smile at that retort.

Mrs. Graves was returned to the stand.

Judge Barnaby's voice was singularly low yet penetrating.

"What did you notice about the kitchen on the morning of the twenty-sixth of September that was out of the ordinary, Mrs. Graves?"

The woman leaned forward in her eagerness to answer the question.

"Laws a' me, I forgot all about mentioning that to the district attorney. There was a place on the drain-board of the sink where young Mr. Sanderson had put himself up a lunch. There were breadcrumbs and a jar of jelly, and part of a loaf of bread, and some potted chicken—you know, like he had left in a hurry and didn't want to be seen in a restaurant."

Lowry smiled again.

The old man was having bad luck with his cross-examination. That point tallied nicely with the theory of the prosecution.

"That's all, and thank you, Mrs. Graves," announced Judge Barnaby.

The woman left the stand with reluctance.

"Carl Linscott to the stand!" boomed L. A. Lowry.

CARL LINSCOTT was a well-groomed young man attired in the latest of styles, a look of aggressive alertness about his face, the poise of his head. His motions were quick and jerky. He took the witness chair, crossed his legs with a quick motion, moistened his lips with his tongue, and darted an expectant glance at L. A. Lowry.

Yes, his name was Carl Linscott, and he was a distant relative of Mr. Enright. Yes, he had been visiting the house at the time of the—er—crime, the murder. He had attended a masquerade ball that night at the Diana Club. No, he had heard nothing of the quarrel between Mr. Enright and the defendant. He had been dressing in his room.

Yes, he went as a clown. Yes, he had returned to the house at about three o'clock in the morning of the twenty-sixth and had seen a light burning in the room of the decedent. He had supposed the old man had been unable to sleep and had looked in the door to say good-night. That he had at once seen blood on the covers of the bed and knew by the color of the deceased that he was dead. That he immediately aroused the house and telephoned Doctor Ranger, who had come to the house within fifteen minutes of the discovery of the body, and had pro-

nounced that the deceased had been dead since midnight.

"Cross-examine!" boomed L. A. Lowry.

Judge Barnaby hesitated. With the case virtually closed it almost appeared that he was about to allow the witness to go without a cross-examination, but then he seemed to change his mind and asked quietly.

"You went to the ball at about what time?"

"Nine o'clock, not later than that, perhaps five or ten minutes before."

"And you next returned to the house when?"

"At about three o'clock in the morning."

"You heard nothing of the quarrel?"

"No, sir, I did not. That is, I did not hear anything of that particular quarrel. However, I knew that there had been much friction between Uncle Phil—that is what I called the deceased—Uncle Phil, and the defendant. Uncle Phil wanted the defendant to propose to a certain young lady, and the defendant had—er—well, he had other plans, another young lady, I believe. I had heard Uncle Phil threaten to leave the defendant out of his will before if he did not yield to Uncle Phil's wishes; but I had never heard Uncle Phil become real angry. However, Uncle Phil told me at dinner that night, before the defendant came in—he was late—that he was going to call for what he termed a 'show-down.' It seems he thought the defendant was late because he was out with this—er—other young lady."

"You, of course, knew you would attend the masquerade ball some time in advance?"

"Oh, yes, I had ordered my costume, and I went out about nine and didn't get back until three. I have here my dance programme showing the persons I danced with. They can all be questioned if it should be necessary to show that I was there all of the time. We unmasked at one, and then I went for a little drive before coming home. That is, I escorted my partner home and didn't hurry particularly from the ball."

Judge Barnaby nodded, turned as though he were finished, then apparently thought of another question.

"You ordered your costume in Los Angeles, I believe?"

The witness flecked his lips with his tongue.

"Yes, sir."

"Where?"

"Why—er—let me see. Oh, by the way, there was one matter I neglected to mention in my other answer. As soon as I discovered Uncle Phil's death I rushed to the defendants' room to call him, but found that the bed had not been slept in, and the defendant was nowhere in the house."

James C. Pratt leaned forward and whispered a moment to Judge Barnaby, then arose and tiptoed from the courtroom.

JUDGE BARNABY'S hand fluttered through the papers before him.

"May I have a moment's indulgence, your honor? I am nearly finished, but I desire to locate some notes.

"Oh yes, here they are"—he turned toward the door, waiting expectantly.

The eyes of the spectators followed his and fastened themselves on the door. The old man was patiently killing time waiting for something.

Then the door opened and Mr. Pratt bustled into the room, nodding reassuringly at Judge Barnaby. The later smiled, a smile of relief, and again turned to the witness who had been watching the by-play with interested eyes.

"You are somewhat prejudiced against the defendant?"

The witness snapped his mouth into a thin line.

"He murdered the kindest, best-hearted old man in the world. Of course I am prejudiced against him."

Again Lowry's eyes twinkled. That boy, Linscott, was making a great witness. He couldn't have answered the question better. That answer seemed to bother Judge Barnaby somewhat, also. He thought for a moment, ran his fingers through his pile of papers, started to say something, paused again and then asked:

"Did you ever advance you opinion that the defendant was guilty of the murder prior to his arrest?"

Unhesitatingly the witness nodded.

"Yes, sir. Not at first, though; but when I saw his bed hadn't been slept in, and saw that the murderer must have been some one that Uncle Phil knew, and rather expected to see in his room, and when I thought that the only one who could possibly benefit by his death would be the defendant, why then I put two and two together and said the circumstances looked mighty suspicious. But I wasn't the first one to say so."

Again Lowry smiled. Linscott was certainly putting a rope all around Judge Barnaby. It was too bad, too. The time was when the old man had been a mighty good lawyer. Of course, he used to pick his cases better, and this was an open-and-shut case, but still, the old judge was making a mighty poor showing. He hadn't made an objection, hadn't pulled any fireworks, hadn't done a thing except ask fool questions that had resulted in harm to his client.

"I wish to ask the court for a few moments more," said Judge Barnaby, after a pause. "I—er—." He broke off and looked toward the door. Again all eyes turned toward the door of the courtroom.

Judge Barnaby leaned forward to Mr. Pratt and whispered. The other nodded, answered and glanced toward the door. There was another whispered conference. Judge Barnaby wrote something on a piece of paper, showed it to Mr. Pratt, who nodded, and then both men glanced at the door.

The clock ticked on through the monotonous whispers. The spectators fidgeted, but kept their eyes on the door. L. A. Lowry took out his gold penknife and cleaned his fingernails, yet found his glassy eyes turning unconsciously toward the door. The witness was in the most uncomfortable position of all. Sitting up there before the eyes of the spectators on the elevation of the witness chair, he crossed and uncrossed his legs, wet his lips, and kept his eyes fastened on the door.

Suddenly the door burst open, and a boy in the uniform of a telegraph messenger came running into the room.

CHAPTER VII

THE SECOND COSTUME

HARDLY had he appeared in the doorway than James C. Pratt was rushing to meet him. The lawyer grabbed the telegram from the boy's hand and passed the telltale yellow envelope over to Judge Barnaby, then signed his name to the pad the boy held up.

All eyes were on Judge Barnaby as he opened the yellow envelope and abstracted the paper within. He and Mr. Pratt bent eagerly, anxiously over that message, then they looked at each other and smiled, a smile of triumph.

L. A. Lowry began to fidget.

Hang it, what was it all about? Those two old codgers seemed mighty jubilant about something. It was a funny case all around. They sure had botched up the trial of it, but this

business of the telegram looked funny.

Judge Barnaby turned to the witness, and in his manner was oily, suave.

"Now you state that the defendant was the only one who could have possibly benefited by the death of the decedent. What did you mean by that?"

"Why, that he was the beneficiary under the will. He wouldn't have been if he had waited for Uncle Phil to draw up a new one."

Judge Barnaby nodded.

"You wouldn't have benefited by his death?"

The witness smiled scornfully.

"I wouldn't have had much motive for his death would I? He was going to make a new will the next day, and I have every reason to suppose that I would have been the beneficiary under that will. It was to my interest to have him live long enough to make a new will, not to have him killed while the old one was in effect."

"But I thought you didn't know about the quarrel, didn't know that he was going to make a new will?"

The witness squirmed, lowered his eyes for a fraction of a second, then raised them to meet Judge Barnaby's steady gaze.

"I know it now, don't I?"

Judge Barnaby arose, a thin figure of a man, attired in a shiny, blue serge suit of very ancient cut.

"Young man, I asked you a few minutes ago where you got the masquerade suit you wore on the night of the ball, and you avoided the question by talking about something else. Why didn't you answer it?"

L. A. Lowry gave one glance at the face of his witness, then heaved to his feet.

"Your honor, I object to the question. It is argumentative, incompetent, irrelevant, immaterial, not proper cross-examination."

The judge also looked at the face of the witness.

"Overruled," he snapped.

"Why didn't you answer?" pressed Judge Barnaby.

The witness took a deep breath and seemed to steady himself.

"Why, I just thought of that other point, and you didn't ask me again."

"All right, young man, I'm asking you now. Where—did—you—get—that—masquerade—costume?"

The witness fidgeted, licked his lips.

"I have—er—I have forgotten. I can't tell. I don't know."

Silence, a tense, dramatic silence, during which the clock seemed to clack forth the seconds of eternity with a jarring noise. The spectators sat forward, eyes wide, ears strained, throughout the courtroom there was that air of psychic tension which presages the birth of great situations.

"Has any one ever accused *you* of this murder?"

The witness thrust forward his jaw.

"No, sir!"

"Then why did you go to the trouble of volunteering the information that you had your dance programme with you and that the times you were at the dance could be proved by your dancing partners? If you were not suspected, why go to so much trouble to prove an alibi?"

Lowry sought to regain control of the situation.

"That's plainly argumentative, your honor."

The judge nodded.

"Yes, that's argumentative, objection sustained," but there was a note of reluctance in his tone as he ruled.

Judge Barnaby pointed his finger at the witness. "Young man, you have testified that the defendant was the only one who could have ben-

efited by the death of Philip Enright. Didn't you know better? Had not you gone to the office of some lawyer in Los Angeles and learned that under the law of California a murderer cannot inherit from his victim? Didn't you know that if Norman Sanderson should be convicted of the murder of Philip Enright that the bequest to Sanderson would fall and go to you by virtue of the residuary clause? Yes or no, now. Didn't you?"

There was again that hideous, ominous silence.

"No," said the witness after a moment, and doomed himself by that answer, for everyone in the courtroom knew that it was a lie, sensed it in his manner, his tone, his downcast eyes. Before them was slowly breaking down the resistance of a human being. Steadily, remorselessly, old Judge Barnaby was tearing from him his power to deceive.

"Now, then, isn't the reason you didn't tell us where you got that costume because you ordered *two* costumes, exactly alike? Didn't you have an accomplice to pose as a masked clown at that masquerade ball while you slipped back to do your bloody deed? Didn't you know that Philip Enright was going to do more than merely threaten to change his will, that he was virtually going to order the defendant from his house, saying that he would not support an ingrate?

"Didn't you know that such a remark would cause a sensitive person like Norman Sanderson to leave the house at once? Didn't you put the words into Philip Enright's mouth? Didn't you really foment all of this trouble, egg the old man on? Didn't you come home to check up on your plan, being fearful that Mr. Enright would never *really* change his will, while your accomplice took your place at the ball? Didn't you see where the defendant had got a hurried lunch in the kitchen when he had left the house? Didn't you take up the bread knife that was on that sink, wrapping up your fingers so there would be none of *your* prints on that knife? Didn't you go to the decedent's room and plunge the knife into his heart, then hide the knife in the closet of the defendant's room, return to the ball and relieve your guilty accomplice?

"If I should have sent a wire to the costuming house where you hired that costume wouldn't they have replied that you insisted on *two* costumes just alike?"

With the words Judge Barnaby waved the yellow telegram before the wide eyes of the witness.

There was no need for an answer to the question. The witness lowered his eyes, clutched at the chair, then fell to the floor in a faint.

That evening as the two old lawyers were motoring out toward their mountain cabin, Mr. Pratt, at the wheel of the light car, showed an uncontrollable desire to talk about the case.

"Of course it was just luck that Sanderson came to our house. It was a fool trick to play the heartbroken hero who hadn't any money and wouldn't propose to the girl he wanted because he was a pauper. Linscott couldn't have foreseen that, but he did know that he had enough to hang Sanderson without it. His only weak point lay in ordering two costumes, but he must have used an assumed name at that."

Judge Barnaby chuckled, something he rarely did.

"You-know, after the case, Lowry came over and wanted to see that telegram. I couldn't very well tell him that was an idea of yours for a stage setting, that we couldn't have

wired the costuming house because we didn't know which one it was, but that you had arranged to have a blank telegram delivered to you. Lowry wouldn't have appreciated the psychology of it. Linscott had confessed, so he didn't need the telegram. I told him I had lost it."

The judge took a blank telegram from his pocket and smoothed it out on his knee. "That'll make a good souvenir of our last case, Mr. Pratt."

Pratt grinned.

"Say, didn't Lowry look awful old? Gosh, but he's changed, aged, you know. He looked twenty years older than when we left the bar ten years ago."

Judge Barnaby straightened.

"I wouldn't say that he had aged, Mr. Pratt, but the boy's maturing rapidly."

Are Finns Jonahs?

In the days of sailing vessels, there was a prejudice against having Finns aboard. They were supposed to be able to manipulate the winds as they wanted, and it was a common belief they possessed a windknot. This was a cord with three knots in it. Unloosen one and a fair wind would blow. Two and a storm rose at once, three a hurricane. Credulous mariners used to buy these knots and Finnish wizards and witches had a great reputation.

To have a Finn a member of the crew was unlucky. In Dana's "Two Years Before the Mast," he tells of a black cook who was afraid of a seaman whom he thought was a Finn. He said Finns were wizards who could do all sorts of uncanny things; he had known one of them, a sailmaker who had a rum bottle, which no matter how often he drank from it, was never empty. He used to hold mysterious conversations with the bottle, and finally cut his throat. A ship beating against a head wind had been passed by a ship with all sail set and a fine wind aft. It was a Finnish ship. A certain captain has accused a Finn of giving him a head wind, and only when the wizard had been shut up in the forepeak did the wind blow fair.

In 1857 a sailor was tried for the murder of another. His defense was that the man was a Finn, and that he thought he was doing right in putting an end to the mischief he was working.

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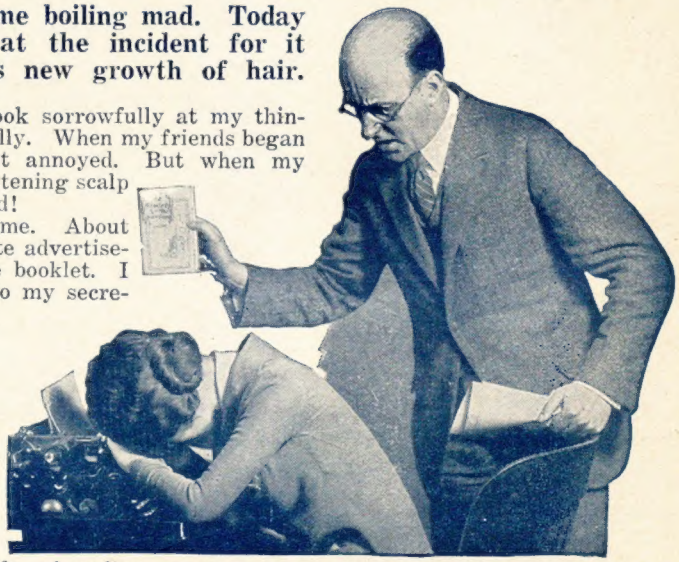
How a Strange Accident Saved Me From Baldness-

Sixty days ago it made me boiling mad. Today I look back and laugh at the incident for it brought me a marvelous new growth of hair.



WHEN my wife began to look sorrowfully at my thinning hair I smiled regretfully. When my friends began to call me "baldy" I felt annoyed. But when my secretary began to look at my glistening scalp and snicker—well it made me mad!

But the worst was yet to come. About sixty days ago I saw a tooth-paste advertisement that offered to send a free booklet. I clipped the coupon and gave it to my secretary to fill in and mail.

Well a few days later, to my utter surprise I found on my desk—not a booklet on tooth-paste—but a booklet telling how to grow hair in 30 days!

I glanced from the booklet to my secretary. I felt my blood boiling.

"Miss Harris," I said to her, "I can't say that I appreciate your sense of humor. Just what is your idea?"

She paled. "Why, Mr. Burns—what's wrong?"

"Wrong?" I shouted, "what's the idea of sending me this hint about my hair?"

Tears came into her eyes. And between sobs she explained why it wasn't her fault.

She said the coupon I asked her to mail had another coupon printed on the back—and the other coupon offered to send a free book about baldness. Well, she simply used her own judgment!

"Hm," was all I could say.

That night on my way home I read the book about baldness. It described an entirely new method of making hair grow—perfected by Alois Merke, founder of the Merke Institute, Fifth Avenue, New York. It is the only treatment I ever heard of that reached right down to the hair roots and awakened them.

As I read on I felt myself weakening in my resolve not to try another hair treatment. And then when I read that Merke actually guaranteed a new growth of hair in 30 days or no cost—well, I sent for the treatment.

The first two or three days, nothing happened. But a week or so later when I looked in the mirror I saw something that almost bowled me over! For there, just breaking through, was a fine downy fuzz all over my head.

Every day this young hair kept getting stronger. At the end of a month you could hardly see a bald spot. And at the end of sixty days—well, my worries were ended. For I had regained an entirely new growth of hair.

Here's the Secret

According to Alois Merke, in most baldness the hair roots are not dead, but merely **dormant.** Now to make a sickly tree grow you would not rub "growing fluid" on the leaves. Yet that is what I had been doing, when I used to douse my head with ordinary tonics, salves, etc. To make a tree grow you must nourish the **roots.** That's exactly what the Merke treatment does.

At the Merke Institute many have paid as high as $500 for results secured. Now these same results may be secured in any home where there is electricity—**for a few cents a day.**

Merke admits that his treatment will not grow hair in every case. There are some cases of baldness that nothing can help. But so many have regained hair this new way, that Merke invites you to try the treatment 30 days at his risk, and if it fails to grow hair then the trial is free. Your money is instantly refunded. You are the sole judge.

Coupon Brings You Full Details

This story is typical of the results that people are securing with the Merke Treatment.

"The New Way to Make Hair Grow," is a 34-page book which will be sent you entirely free if you mail the coupon below. This book tells all about the new treatment, shows what it has done for others, and contains much valuable information on the care of the hair. Remember, this book is yours free. And if you decide to take the treatment, you don't risk a penny. So mail coupon now. Address Allied Merke Institute, Inc., Dept. 1552, 512 Fifth Ave., New York.

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"I have used your system for eight weeks and although the top of my head has been entirely bald for six years, the results up to the present are gratifying. In fact, the entire bald spot is covered with a fine growth of hair."—W. B., Kenmore, Ohio.

(Original of above letters on file at the Institute.)

How a *Faux Pas* Made Me Popular

I never knew it was so easy to be popular until a humiliating experience showed me the secret

THE day I met Grace we went swimming. There was another chap along — Harry something — a dapper, grinning fellow with his hair slicked back. He was awkward in the water and his bathing suit hung about him like a wet sack. I didn't see how Grace could stand him.

My Fatal Mistake

That night at the hotel dance I learned a lesson. The first couple that caught my eye was Grace and Harry—but what a different Harry! His slick hair and dapper manner seemed to fit the picture perfectly. And how easily—how faultlessly he danced!

"Aren't you going to ask me to dance?" Grace called gaily to me.

I flushed, realizing I couldn't dance a step. "Why, I—I'd love to, but——"

"All right," Grace broke in, "the next dance is yours."

Before I could speak the orchestra started to play—a dreamy oriental tune. Grace stood waiting. I could feel Harry's smirking eyes on me. I made a wild stab. "I'm sorry—but I can't tango."

"That's a waltz!" Grace laughed.

"I don't waltz either," I faltered, realizing I had made a faux pas—a blunder.

"I don't think you want to dance with me at all," she flashed. Before I could explain further, she and Harry had glided away. I stumbled out of the ball room. Grace's last words—"I'll never speak to you again!" were ringing in my ears.

Why I Never Made Friends

That night I was mighty blue. Why couldn't I make a hit with the girls like the other fellows did? Girls liked me at first but later they went off with fellows who took them dancing. That was my weak point—I could never be popular unless I learned to dance. I had heard of a new way to learn—at home, without music or teacher. Arthur Murray, America's foremost dancing instructor, had perfected this method. I sent for his free booklet and test lesson.

The booklet came promptly and I read it through without stopping. Here was just what I needed. I tried the test lesson and was amazed at the ease with which I was able to master the steps. The lessons were so clear, so simple. I grew confident—eager to dance to music and a real partner.

An Exciting Night

I continued learning so I could attend the coming mask ball at the hotel.

What an exciting night that was! I danced with many partners, keeping perfect time, gliding around the floor like a professional! Midnight found me dancing with a charming creature in a soft, clinging costume.

"Where **did** you learn to dance so divinely?" she murmured. She was masked but her voice thrilled me strangely. Later I told her the whole story—How I met a beautiful girl and lost her in a day—how wretched I felt—how I learned to dance in my own room.

She caught my hand. "Oh, I'm sorry——" Her voice broke—the voice that thrilled me so strangely. I brushed aside her mask. Imagine my wonder—surprise—joy! It was Grace who was smiling up at me!

What wonderful times we had together after that. We went everywhere—parties, balls and dances. No longer was I a gloomy wallflower, envying others. I was throbbing with new life, new popularity, acclaimed as a faultless dancer wherever I went. The day I wrote to Arthur Murray was certainly the luckiest in my life.

This story is typical. Thousands have learned to dance quickly and easily through Arthur Murray's course. And so can you.

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